Athlete-Coach Conflict and a Sport Psychologist Caught in the Middle: A Case Study of Consultancy During Athlete Preparation and Performance in Olympic Games Athletics.

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Abstract

This case study examines the personal experiences of an elite athlete, coach, and sport psychology consultant (SPC) during the athlete's preparation and performance in a recent Olympic Games. The qualitative research details how the consultancy process was affected by the athlete's late admission of the deteriorating relationship with his coach. The concepts of *Closeness, Commitment, Complementarity, and Co-orientation* provided a theoretical perspective to the SPC's interpretation of athlete performance and the interpersonal conflict that developed between athlete and coach. The basic Performance Demand Model *(PDM) provided an applied perspective.* The SPC's commentary adopts a reflexive discursive style that also focuses on the SPC's role in the consultancy process and the effectiveness of the PDM materials. Five important recommendations arise from the case study and these might inform other SPCs' future athlete-coach consultancies and interventions.

Keywords: Sport psychology consultancy, athlete-coach conflict, Performance Demand Model, Olympic track and field athletics, sport psychology case study

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Introduction

Sport psychologists have recognized that athlete-coach relationships can affect performance (e.g., Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001). From interviews with Olympic athletes, Greenleaf et al. (2001) found a number of athlete-coach relationship factors that influenced performance. Positive influences were coach contact, trust, and friendship. Negative influences were especially relevant for athletes who did not meet performance expectations and included coach conflict, lack of access to a personal coach, inaccurate coach technical information or technical changes made by a coach, and lack of coach focus on team climate. Other research has supported the view that not all athlete-coach relationships function well and some can become dysfunctional as a result of disagreement or conflict between the two (Jowett, 2003; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; LaVoi, 2007; Wachsmuth, Jowett, & Harwood, 2017). For example, in a case study of an athlete-coach relationship in crisis, Jowett (2003) found differences in the athlete's and coach's perceptions about their athletic relationship and areas of emotional isolation, disagreements, and incompatibility.

Jowett and colleagues' research work (summarized in Jowett, 2007) has used the concepts of *Closeness, Commitment, Complementarity, and Co-orientation* as a means of examining the interpersonal relationships that exist between athletes and coaches. Here, closeness deals with affective aspects of the relationship, the emotions involved, and, for example, feelings of trust. Commitment is the cognitive element and reflects the athlete's and coach's long term orientation to their relationship. Complementarity represents behavioral aspects and can be seen in their ongoing reciprocal cooperation during training and at competition. Co-orientation was added to cover the athlete's and coach's interpersonal perceptions and indicates the degree to which they have established a real understanding in their relationship. In many ways, athlete and coach are dependent on each other and considering their

closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation gives an indication of the strength of that interdependence (Jowett, 2007). Later work (Wachsmuth, Jowett, & Harwood, 2018) focused on the specific nature of athlete-coach interpersonal conflict and examined practical applications useful for sport psychology consultants (SPCs) in dealing with athlete-coach conflict. After interviewing different coaches and athletes, Wachsmuth et al. (2018) found that participants understood and interpreted interpersonal conflict in different ways and this influenced how any conflict further developed. Participants described differences in: the intensity, duration, and frequency of conflict; the timing and location of conflict; and the onset, escalation and, in some cases, management of conflict. Findings also indicated that when cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of athlete-coach interpersonal conflict were taken into account, negative conflict appraisals and poor communication could, for example, lead to uncertainty, escalation, and withdrawal responses. In addition, Wachsmuth, et al., (2020), investigated how SPCs prevented and/or managed coach-athlete conflict and the challenges SPCs faced in this type of work. They identified six different roles that SPCs could play in dealing with athlete-coach conflict. These included roles aimed at: preventing conflict in general, identifying, analyzing, and developing strategies to manage specific conflict situations; counselling either athlete or coach individually, or facilitating the development of open and honest communication between the two; and maintaining a healthy athletic environment by being aware of and managing any dysfunctional interaction between athlete and coach. Other conceptual models have been proposed (e.g., LaVoi, 2007; Poczwardowski, Henschen, & Barott, 2002), but the authors considered Jowett and colleagues' model and research work to be the most comprehensive and useful for understanding and interpreting the athlete-coach conflict in the present case study reported below.

Case studies can allow practitioners to assess their effectiveness and evaluate their interventions in a real-world context, helping develop evidence-based practice for future use by themselves and other practitioners (Anderson et al., 2002; Gardner & Moore, 2006). The purpose of the present case study was to: (1) provide an understanding of the personal experiences of an SPC, a male

elite athlete and male coach during the athlete's preparation and performance in a recent Olympic Games; (2) detail how the consultancy process was affected by the athlete's late admission of his deteriorating relationship with his coach, using Jowett's (2007) model for comparison; (3) describe the sport psychology interventions implemented by the SPC, evaluate their effectiveness and examine and evaluate the SPC's professional practice methods; (4) use the basic Performance Demand Model (PDM; e.g., Hudson, Males, & Kerr, 2019) *to provide an applied perspective.*

Method

Participants

Rick (pseudonym) was a male track and field athlete (throwing event) who was aspiring to selection in the Great Britain (GB) team for the Olympic Games. In order to qualify for the Olympic team Rick needed to throw the International Amateur Athletics Federation (IAAF) A-standard, as well as finish in the top 2 or 3 at the National trials. Rick was disappointed with his performance at a recent World championships and believed that his mental preparation for major events needed to improve. His coach, Steve (pseudonym) was relatively inexperienced as a coach, but was a former athlete in the same event. The SPC was a former International athlete and Olympic coach with extensive experience of applied sport psychology work with Olympic and Paralympic athletes and coaches. He fulfilled the dual role of SPC and researcher. As an SPC, his focus was on supporting the athlete during his preparation for the Olympics and, as a researcher his aim was to carry out the case study research according to established procedures in qualitative research (e.g., Hodge *& Sharp, 2016; Yi*n, 1994). The research had beeen planned prior to contact with athlete and coach. The biographical details of athlete and coach have been kept to a minimum. Age, dates, locations of athletics events, and throwing distances have not been included to protect the confidentiality of athlete and coach. This includes the verbatim example quotes included below, where place names, words or terms have been deleted.

Data Collection, Interpretation and Methodological Rigor

Data was collected from the face-to-face meetings, Skype conferences and phone contacts

between the SPC and Rick and/or Steve which were recorded and later transcribed verbatim. In addition, the SPC maintained his own written notes. Rick also kept a training log that he made available to the SPC. The SPC later interpreted the data on Rick's pre- and Olympic experience, including his performances and deteriorating relationship with Steve, as well as post-Olympic reflections by Rick, Steve and himself. The SPC also evaluated the effectiveness of his intervention and his overall role as an SPC. The methodological rigor (following guidelines by Smith & McGannon, 2017) of the present research was enhanced by the following: (1) the case study methodology allowed for multiple sources of information about ongoing training and competitions from athlete, coach and SPC to be collected (Tracy, 2010); (2) detailed description of data collected and subsequent interpretation, supported by quotations from Rick and Steve were provided; (3) Rick and Steve were asked for their reflections post-Olympic Games to enhance the understanding of their experiences (Smith & McGannon, 2017); (4) triangulation was provided in the form of professional supervision of the study (Author, 2013) by two sports psychologists, both with over 25 years of experience in qualitative research. They critically examined the data and interpretation and provided feedback for the SPC to consider and act on where necessary; (5) reflection by the SPC formed an integral part of the data analysis and interpretation process (Cropley & Hanton, 2012), and (6) the SPC had considerable previous experience of undertaking qualitative research, as well as in providing services for athletes in previous Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Case Background and Chronology

The SPC was introduced to Rick via a mutual acquaintance and agreed to provide a program of sport psychology support at no fee, in return for Rick and Steve's participation in this case study research. There was a total of 39 contacts between SPC, athlete and/or coach. Superscript numbers in brackets below refer to the most important contacts (see Table 1). Contracting was agreed on by phone[(1)] and the first face-to-face meeting took place with athlete and coach a month later[(2)]. They both completed a British University informed consent form at this time. Due to Rick’s training and travel

schedule, subsequent interaction occurred predominantly through Skype conference calls and email.

The next scheduled contact was a three-way Skype call(3) between Rick, Steve and the SPC. This came at the end of a hard training block, during which Rick achieved four different personal bests in the gym on four different exercises. Soon after that Rick and Steve travelled to a training camp in the US where he also competed in his first two competitions of the season. Another Skype call(4) was focused on reviewing the training camp and looking ahead to two important competitions (one in Germany and one in Britain) held on consecutive days. Rick and Steve planned to use these events to replicate the Olympic competition format of qualifications and a final. Rick and the SPC spoke by phone(5) a week after these competitions. Rick was ill at the first competition but managed his third best competitive distance of the season. He competed again the next day, but his throws were still under the Olympic qualifying distance.

A Skype call with Rick(6) occurred again the day after the United Kingdom Athletics (UKA) team trials. In the intervening few weeks Rick had competed in three competitions in an attempt to throw the Olympic qualifying distance. His performances were all below his season average. He had only finished third in the trials, which meant that his place in the Olympic team was still conditional on throwing the required distance. Rick was due to fly to the European Championships where he subsequently failed again. He had one last opportunity to qualify at a British regional athletics meet where he performed well and secured his place on Team GB for the Olympics. The next significant contact was a face-to-face meeting(7) with the SPC instigated by Rick and attended by him alone. Rick reported that his relationship with Steve had become strained and, despite his qualification for the Games, his mood was negative. They spoke at length about the situation and developed a strategy for the forthcoming pre-Games training camp abroad.

The final contact before the Games was a Skype conversation(8). Rick and the SPC talked at length about the Olympic environment and his performance plan. The SPC also proposed a range of "what-if" scenarios to ensure that Rick felt confident in the face of unexpected events. Rick competed

in the Olympics and threw well below the gold medal winning distance. The SPC received post-Olympics review feedback from Rick[9] through formal evaluation and follow-up questions regarding his Olympic experience the consultation/intervention process and the PDM materials used. As part of this feedback Rick advised the SPC that Steve was no longer acting as his coach. The SPC also received post-Olympics review feedback from Steve[10] on Rick's Olympic performance, the consultation/intervention process, and the PDM materials used.

Use of the PDM

The PDM **which has its roots in Reversal Theory *(Apter, 1982, 2001; Kerr, 1997, in sport),*** takes *a* process view of performance in sport based on four psychological fundamentals: *mastery motivation*, *decision making*, *execution*, *teamwork*, confirmed by research evidence from athletes and coaches (Hudson, Males, & Kerr, 2019; Males, Hudson, & Kerr, 2018, 2020). It provides a working model of the relationship between mental state and sports performance. The PDM has:

> a generic framework, adaptable to the dynamic processes and transitions involved in a range of sports. It is relevant for both applied sport psychologists and coaches set in a coach-friendly sport psychology framework with the aim of benefitting competitive performance. In practice, use of the PDM begins with the athlete and coach identifying the specific psychological demands to be faced, and successfully overcome, through the different stages of their event. Coaches and athletes are then invited to generate their own solutions to a commonly agreed, understood and contextualized set of challenges across pre-event, competition, and post-event stages of competition in what is a natural process of learning and adaption (Males, Hudson, & Kerr, 2020).

Before the first meeting, the SPC sent Rick and Steve a copy of the PDM Fundamentals document (see Table 2) then explained the material in more detail at the meeting. The SPC asked them both to adapt and validate a final PDM checklist focusing on the five days of Olympic competition. They then completed a sources of self-confidence questionnaire (see Table 3). The SPC took notes throughout the meeting that were typed up as a first draft PDM checklist that was returned to Rick and

Steve the next day for feedback and validation. They were asked to inform the SPC of: (a) anything that needed to be changed or added so that it captured the key points; and (b) any other aspects they felt were less than 100% relevant for his specific event. The final version of the PDM checklist is shown in Figure 1. The SPC also asked Rick to rate the relative priority of each of the sources of self-confidence by rating: (a) the ideal strength for each source, on a 1 to 10 scale (where 10 is absolutely important and you need it to be 100%, and (b) how you currently feel about each one, again on a 1 to 10 scale. The reason for this exercise was to be rigorous in paying attention to the sources that gave Rick the most confidence, and to increase the level of control and influence over the things that could make the most difference to performance. The SPC suggested that they re-visit the final PDM checklist every couple of weeks.

Findings and Discussion

SPC's Interpretive Commentary

The text in the SPC interpretive commentary is presented in a reflexive, personalized, discursive style as suggested by Leavitt et al. (2018) in their recommendations for reporting qualitative research findings to the American Psychological Association's Publications and Communications Board Task Force. This style is used to allow readers to get a real-life, authentic understanding of the feelings, reactions, and experiences of the athlete, coach, and SPC as events evolved during the research period. Where relevant, reference is made to aspects of Jowett's (2007; Wachsmuth, et al. 2018, 2020) conceptual model of interpersonal factors which affect athlete-coach relationships. The intention was to integrate the findings of the sport psychology consultancy with an athlete and coach preparing for Olympic competition with an established theoretical approach, helpful in understanding the dynamics of their athlete-coach relationship.

Interpreting athlete Rick's experience.

Rick and Steve had a clear idea of the distance needed to be “in the medal zone” at the Olympics so, should Rick throw to his full potential, reaching the final was a realistic goal. Although

the performance goals and distance targets were clear and unambiguous, Rick and Steve both emphasized the importance of focusing on technical process goals, in this case “hitting every position at 100%”. Rick articulated the view that “If I execute well, the distance will take care of itself”. I was struck by the serious and professional approach of the athlete and coach, their attention to detail and emphasis on the importance of technique. Rick expressed confidence in Steve’s approach:

> He believes I can beat anybody in the world and with that he absolutely transfers that enthusiasm and passion through me and I bring out his model and his thoughts about how to throw a [projectile] in the field. Without him I don’t think I would have thrown it as far as I have and be the man, the athlete that I am today. He’s done a lot of work with me, for me, and I think because of his background, the training style, the methodology, the strategies he implements have played a significant part in our success. I like routine, I love familiarity, and on being able to be familiar with your environment and having a strategy, having a plan, and Steve has that in abundance.

In terms of Jowett's (2007) athlete-coach interpersonal relationship factors, the SPC's early impression was that both Rick and Steve had a serious and professional approach with clear and unambiguous performance and process targets, attention to detail, and emphasis on the importance of technique, all of which suggested long-term commitment and co-orientation. Also, elements of Rick's quote immediately above suggested that the closeness of the athlete-coach relationship was strong.

In the three-way Skype call[(3)] at the end of the hard training block, in which Rick achieved four different personal bests in the gym, I asked him to explain what was different during the training block. Rick said:

> What I found that week once I looked backed was that each previous day I had mentally prepared my mind for big lifts [sic] in the gym. I approached the session knowing what I needed to do and what l wanted to do. As a consequence of this, nothing came to me as a surprise and hence I committed to each lift. Furthermore, I also applied the same tactic physically too. In effect, I made sure I had enough to eat that week, had all the relevant supplements at the right times and

increased the dosage where I needed to and, more importantly, made sure that I recovered well. So I went to bed early before the heavy day and on the day of the heavy lifts.

I explained how this description was consistent with an enhanced focus on mastery motivation (PDM), summed up by an expression Rick used that he had to "leave tiredness at the door" before a training session. Mastery motivation is characterized by an attitude to training and competition that is professional, goal-directed, and positive. The athlete is intrinsically motivated as they base their competence judgments on mastery of process goals and not competition outcomes, enabling them to approach and seek out competition as a challenge, and as a way to demonstrate competence. This orientation resonates with similar ideas drawn together by Conroy, Eliot, and Coatsworth (2007) in their integration of achievement motivation theory (e.g., McClelland, 1987) and self-determination theory (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000). Examples of positive indicators of mastery motivation include appropriate focus on pre-competition preparation, and example negative indicators include a lack of self-efficacy. Rick also identified additional sources of self-confidence: "work colleagues who are impressed with my level of drive; world class lifting in the gym; content with my life; and being a role model to younger throwers in our training group". **Most of these sources can be seen to reinforce Rick's mastery motivation, apart from the first and last that are based on social comparison rather than being self-referenced.**

We concluded the call by talking about Rick's goals for the forthcoming training camp in the US, which were to make the transition to a heavier projectile (he used a lighter projectile in pre-season training), hit his technical positions consistently, and not "chase distance". These goals were all consistent with the definition of mastery motivation as they were self-referenced process goals that provided clear steps towards successful competitive performances. Following the conversation, I again updated the PDM checklist and sent it to Rick by email. Rick's feedback was:

I have looked at the format of the performance model and I think it's very accurate and relates to me well . . . .Would you like me to use this model on a weekly basis so that I can see and measure

how well and how far I am away from it? I really like it because it gives a clear indication of where I am and where I want to be.

Rick had a positive experience at the US camp in April. He received complimentary feedback from other competitors and from the UKA Performance Director, and believed he made good technical progress, especially with the move to a heavier projectile. The following report came at the end of the camp just before returning to the UK:

> My training performance has got better and better. Technically hitting the right positions, doing some exciting things which surprised Steve and myself. We have learned a lot out here. We know now even more that it is important we train heavy during this period and ensure we peak at the right time. I know looking at the guys throwing [further than me] that I am not too far from them. I learned the first round throw is very important and has a massive impact on the group [of] athletes I am with so it is important I execute that well. We also learned that I compete well and manage pressure well. I was in a very competitive environment this weekend, both Thursday and Saturday when world leading distances were thrown and it did not faze me because I know we have a plan, and more importantly, I believe in our plan.

Rick's language is inclusive of Steve and suggests that their relationship was still on a firm footing. Rick's throwing performances were receiving compliments from important observers and they were both excited by Rick's technical progress, suggesting that Steve's coaching advice was working, and Rick was very confident about their plan which appeared to be paying off. In thinking about Jowett's (2007) model, the indications were that complimentarity could now be added to closeness, commitment, and co-orientation as factors underlying their still apparently well-functioning relationship.

Throughout this period Rick reported that he was also pleased with his performance in the two outdoor US competitions:

> I felt a little nervous going into it [the first competition] as it was a seeded event with which I was

> put into the top seed with throwers who had done 3-4 comps already and were in a peak period of their training. Albeit a [bit] tight in the movement, however, technically it was not too bad. One of the main things I took away was the fact that my first round throw was the one [I] nailed and had a few of the competitors shocked. More so, because my warm-ups were not great. I was over the moon with that, as that is something we have been working on. I took a lot of confidence from this competition because I know I am in heavy training and I know once I sharpen up I will be beating these guys.

Up to this point Rick had been making good progress and was feeling positive. This changed dramatically after a German competition. A week after this competition, Rick reported(5) that his last training session before leaving was poor – he "forgot how to throw" and his timing was out. He had also picked up a minor calf strain. On the morning of the German competition, he awoke feeling ill, but chose to compete anyway. However, he finished in the top ten with his third best competitive distance of the season. He then returned to the UK to compete the next day where he performed poorly. He was deeply frustrated at the lost opportunities to reach the qualifying standard, as well as feeling upset about his illness.

I had noticed that both he and Steve tended to be highly optimistic and positive. My assessment of the situation was that Rick needed to acknowledge the depth of his feelings about the German event rather than try too hard to be positive too soon. I advised him to take the time to identify and express his feelings using a journal or a private place to talk out loud about the event and give full vent to his frustration. I explained that emotions are natural and that they can and do change quickly, and a negative emotion lasting this long after the cause was due to the situation being mentally "re-visited" (Watkins, 2009).

The day after the UKA team trials, we spoke again(6) and, despite feeling more positive about his experience at the German competition since our last conversation, he reported feeling slow and "like a robot" when throwing, and feeling deeply frustrated as a consequence. His performances were

all below his season average. He described his performance at the trials as “all or nothing” and better technically but still “slow in the middle”. Rick was trying too hard, thus interfering with the automatic execution of his technique and “in the moment” awareness during execution (PDM).

Rick was due to fly the next day for the European Championships. **Based on my previous experience with other Olympic athletes**, I advised that he keep his focus on his immediate challenge, to trust his technique, to enjoy the competition and to allow himself to throw well. Rick’s performance was below the Olympic standard, but he had one last opportunity to qualify at a regional athletic meeting back in the UK where he achieved the necessary distance and secured his place on Team GB for the forthcoming Olympic games.

In Rick’s own words:

> . . . . my mental approach was massively different; I went in with a do or die attitude and really drilled in what I felt would work for me. Although Steve was there, he didn't talk to me. Actually, before I competed, he told my wife that it was over and that I was not going to the Games…. Equally, this season has also taught me how powerful the mind is and to switch on the facets to get the best out of me. At [this competition] I made the decision to succeed before I went to the comp and I did. That alone changed my approach to the competition.

His comments suggest that he was not reliant on support from his coach and was able to maintain a strong focus that drove his determination to succeed. The “do or die” focus on strong execution (PDM) was also notable, and markedly different from the earlier stated attitude of focusing on technique and letting the distance take care of itself. The SPC had seen the "do or die" approach work with other performers, but it was not ideal, consistent, or replicable and required the right external circumstances (e. g., a last-chance scenario). The situation with Rick was compounded by the environment. It was a local British regional athletics meet, not an international event. So there was less at play in terms of crowds, status, reputation and, as the SPC would find out later, the wind and flight conditions also gave athletes a big advantage. It was hard to decide how much a "do or die" approach had to do with the

actual distance thrown. It remained an outlier for Rick's whole season.

It was also apparent from his comments that Rick's relationship with Steve had started to unravel. This was likely prompted by his poor performances prior to the last regional meet and his final attempt at successful Olympic qualification. Communication had broken down and Steve had lost confidence in Rick's ability to throw the qualifying distance, illustrated by his comment to Rick's wife. Also, at that last regional competition, Rick deviated from the agreed plan that had previously been so important to them both, adopting a different approach. Fortunately, that approach worked. However, at this stage it became clear that the apparently high levels of closeness, commitment, co-orientation, and complimentarity (Jowett, 2007) that had characterized their prior athlete-coach relationship were severly under threat, if not much reduced.

Our next significant contact was a face-to-face meeting[7]. Rick requested this meeting and he attended without Steve. He appeared troubled and expressed his concerns about his relationship with Steve. Rick was not confident about Steve’s ability to support him through the Games, because Steve seemed unable to offer helpful coaching input to address the problems with his technique and timing that had persisted since the beginning of the competitive season. Rick also believed that Steve was losing confidence, which was reflected in Steve reducing his own energy and commitment. Rick had originally listed his relationship with Steve as an important source of confidence. This negative example illustrates the important role effective teamwork (PDM) plays in supporting an athlete’s self-confidence. The deteriorating relationship contributed to Rick’s overall mood, which he described as frustrated, joyless, and stressed. This meeting revealed the breakdown in the athlete-coach relationship to the SPC and the extent of the breakdown was confirmed by the fact that Steve did not attend. According to Jowett (2007), athlete-coach relationships that result in conflict can lead to antisocial or self-interested behavior, hostile thoughts, or one party seeking to disadvantage or make gains to the detriment of the other. This in turn can lead to further escalation of the conflict. Rick and Steve did not have an argument resulting in acrimonious conflict. It was more that by degrees their relationship

became dissonant and largely dysfunctional and Rick decided to work on his own. Rick's feelings about Steve's coaching and commitment had clearly changed and this he found unpleasant. It was clear that their athletic relationship had broken down on cognitive, emotional and behavioral levels (Jowett, 2007).

My realistic interpretation was that Rick had become too fixated on achieving technical excellence and was trying too hard and that this was leading to too much conscious processing and interference with his technique (Carver & Schemer, 1988). Consequently, his ability to execute (PDM) was impaired. This was feeding his dissatisfaction with Steve so that it created a negative spiral in Rick's confidence. Rather than feeling energized and looking forward to the Games (effective mastery motivation (PDM)), Rick was experiencing the journey as a problem to be solved – essentially the same pattern we had talked about earlier in the season. This attitude appeared to have become more entrenched, with negative consequences for Rick's energy and engagement. We spoke at length about the situation and I offered this formulation to Rick, emphasizing the need for him to refocus his mastery motivation now that he had achieved qualification, and find ways of re-capturing his enjoyment for the sport.

Here is the follow-up note I sent Rick the next day, reflecting on our meeting:

> It was good to sit and talk with you yesterday, and even if our time was shorter than hoped I felt like it was worthwhile. I trust it was for you. You've done the hard job – that was qualification. The mindset that got you there isn't now the right mindset for the Games. Take some time to relax, to laugh, to have some FUN. You need to re-set your brain to get out of the unproductive cycle of trying hard to get your technique right – and getting frustrated. Your technique is already right, you've spent years getting it right, and it's now time to get the effortful striving, serious part of yourself out of the way. That doesn't mean that you become any less professional. It simply means that continuing to try hard will make things worse. Instead remember the feeling and tap into the JOY of throwing a [projectile], of watching it fly and hang in the air. And imagine how

much fun it will be to experience that in the Games. The distance and the results will then take care of themselves. You don't have to win every training session; some will go well and others won't. Trust in yourself. Enjoy what you do. Appreciate the opportunity that you've worked so hard to create. And now is not the time to make any long-term decisions about working with Steve. Focus on getting as much as you can from the relationship, without being over-reliant. I'm happy to talk more about this if it helps, particularly to help you think through your plans for Games time. The real beauty of sport is what it teaches us about ourselves. You're learning really important things through this period, and the full implications will only reveal themselves over the years ahead.

Go well!

Rick responded a few days later:

The time we spent was very useful. I found it worthwhile and also a bit of a relief to take a lot of things off my chest. When I left you on Sunday evening l felt better straight away.

I took your direction on Sunday and relaxed and chilled with [wife's name], we watched movies and had a laugh. I felt mentally better and happier. I did not think about athletics or the Games for that day. Strangely enough it felt good. You are right in saying l know how to throw and l need to bring back the fun element back into my life and that is what l intend to do.

There are two aspects to this intervention. By allowing Rick to talk openly about his concerns I was able to help him renew his confidence in his approach – refreshing his decision making (PDM) capability. The conversation also helped Rick recognize and accept the need to sometimes be playful (e.g., “watching a movie and having a laugh”) rather than spending most, if not all, his time being serious. The benefits were still apparent when Rick reported from the GB team’s pre-Olympic training camp, from where he sent this e-mail:

Hope all is well. Apologies for not updating you recently. Life has been manic of late.

So far things have been going well. Training is a lot better. I'm doing things that make me happy

and I am enjoying myself very much. I feel so much lighter mentally and a lot more relieved for some reason. Steve is out here with us too although he is in a different hotel. He seems to have re-discovered his appetite again. He is very positive and excited again. He talked about not getting any kit so I gave him a couple of shirts and I think that has helped make him better. All in all, I am in a better place than I have been and just as focused and relaxed as we approach entering the village. I'm spending a lot of time in my room as I want to continue this precedence in the village. Thanks for all your help recently. Hopefully speak soon.

Rick's quote above suggests that the disconnection in his athlete-coach relationship with Steve had been repaired and re-established to some extent. There was no evidence to suggest what might have prompted this positive upturn, but it might be assumed that Rick's Olympic qualification was the cause.

The next important contact was via Skype[(8)] when we talked at length about the Olympic environment and his performance plan. We also considered a range of "what-if" scenarios to ensure that Rick felt confident in the face of unexpected events. This forms another important component of effective decision making (PDM), by rationally preparing for a wide range of eventualities. He reported feeling confident and relaxed, and looking forward to competing in the Olympics.

Interpreting coach Steve's experience

As the athlete-coach conflict played out, I had more contact with Rick than with Steve and that is reflected in the findings. **S**teve was initially involved in all our meetings and conversations, and he was consistently positive and optimistic in his assessment of the working relationship and Rick's progress at the time. When we all spoke just prior to the US training camp[(4)], Steve claimed that Rick was "on fire" and expressed great satisfaction at Rick's technical improvements as well as the gym performances. He expressed confidence that everything was on track and that the distances would come. A month later he spoke of the strength of their working partnership as a core source of confidence for Rick:

I think our overall preparation, and we are incredibly professional in our preparation and we

> discuss these things together as a team. It's not just a one-way-traffic kind of relationship that we have. We discuss things, we talk about things, this is how we want to do it, this is what works. If it ain't broke we never ever try and fix it, and we go with things we know that we're both comfortable with.

When reviewing the US camp and preparing for the events in Germany and Britain, used to replicate the Olympic competition format, Steve alluded to "not having quite nailed the technique" with the heavier projectile in the US. Yet, he was confident of progress and believed that Rick was "clicking into his rhythm" evidenced by "the best outdoor technical sessions yet". This positive assessment contrasted with his views at the end of the season, when he said:

> The first half of the season, while we were training indoors, was beyond expectations. The second half, maybe 5 or 6 out of 10. There was a dividing line, when we came outdoors with the training camp in [place name]. The quality of winter training probably meant that Rick put his expectations too high and he became distance- rather than technically-focused. Indoors he performed into a net so he never saw the outcome (i.e., distance). In February we were training (indoors) and the current world champ came to watch us train. He was impressed and said 'there's nothing to improve technically'. So we were ahead of expectations. Every session (indoors) Rick was on the orbit, feeling relaxed. Once he went outdoors he got very tense and the orbit was too flat. I tried everything to get him to relax more – maybe it was the pressure of the Games. He just kept trying harder. And in this sport the harder you try the worse it gets.

Steve found this situation increasingly frustrating because he was unable to help Rick regain his timing and rhythm. To compound this, Steve described Rick as "going into a shell" and reducing the level and quality of communication. By the time of the European championships, Steve believed that Rick had stopped listening to him and was essentially "on his own". Steve also felt that Rick was starting to blame him for the situation. Steve framed this situation purely as a technical problem and made no connection with any psychological factors other than Rick was now "trying too hard" and had

become obsessed with distance rather than technique:

> As the season went on communication began to break down. I worked extremely hard, going up to [town name] four times a week, and I wasn't always looking forward to it. Our relationship wasn't breaking down, but it wasn't good.

This description suggests that Steve experienced coaching as a chore rather than a rewarding challenge. The attributes of mastery motivation (PDM) are just as relevant for coaches, who also need to access a sense of positive challenge.

Steve's assessment of Rick's performance at the crucial final regional event is significantly different from Rick's. Technically, Steve believed that Rick's throws at the regional event were not as good as at the European Championships or his final throw at the Olympic Games. Steve claimed that the regional event stadium was extremely favorable for Rick's event. He gave the example of another athlete who also increased his personal best performance significantly on the same evening. This marked discrepancy between coach and athlete assessment was not identified at the time, nor was it discussed later. It is likely that both felt a sense of relief that the Olympic dream remained alive and Steve saw no reason to be critical of Rick's success, especially given Steve's frustration that Rick was no longer listening to him.

Coach Steve's comments in the section above provide confirmation of the SPC's initial impression of the breakdown in the athlete-coach relationship, elaborating somewhat on Rick's view of its status. Good two-way interpersonal communication is necessary for effective coaching (Jowett, 2007; La Voi, 2007) and Steve's perception was that, at the two athletic meets before the Olympics he was no longer getting through to Rick, who had stopped listening. In Jowett's (2007) model, communication is considered a means to establish a functional athlete-coach relationship and, in turn, that relationship can then affect communication positively or negatively. For Rick and Steve the lack of productive communication reflected the breakdown in their relationship and the subsequent negative feelings. In addition, Steve's perception was that Rick was also blaming him for the relationship

disconnect which was failing on all four factors (closeness, commitment co-orientation and complimentarity), and on affective, cognitive and behavioral levels (Jowett, 2007; Wachsmuth, et al., 2020).

Athlete Reflection on Relationship with Coach

The coach–athlete relationship was an important factor for Rick, which changed significantly through the season. Rick described the relationship in these terms at our initial meeting: “My coach believes in me and has faith in me, that’s the number one and most important thing, he inspires me by the fact that he has unshakable belief in my ability”. Rick also listed his coach as an important source of self-confidence and regular contact with the coach was the core factor within the teamwork dimension of the PDM. Yet, when asked to nominate the most important sources of confidence during the Games, Rick did not mention his coach, instead nominating: “The sources of confidence which were most important to me were ones from my faith, my wife, my family friends, sponsors and the media”. The SPC also noticed during the post-Olympics review feedback conversations with Rick and Steve[9&10] that they offered different answers to the question “What was the main competitive focus for the season?” Steve said, “to produce a good technical performance at the Olympic Games; if that happens then we’ll come away with a respectable distance”, which indicates a process goal orientation. Rick’s goals were to throw the A standard for the Olympics, win or come top two at the Olympic Trials, make the Olympic final and then achieve well over the qualifying distance in the final. These are all outcome or performance goals. This is an important difference that can be seen to underlie the tension and lack of complementarity (Jowett, 2007) that developed between coach and athlete.

However, at the Games themselves Rick reported that Steve was relaxed and the relationship had improved from a low point prior to qualification. Nevertheless, Rick had limited contact with Steve, much less than described as necessary when I first met them. When reviewing his whole season Rick described the coaching relationship as a source of distraction:

This [breakdown] hindered my performance initially as I struggled to focus and at times my

energy was directed at fixing the structure as opposed to focusing on the task at hand which was to focus on getting my timing right.

When we spoke post-Olympics[10], it was apparent that Steve found the process of working with Rick extremely challenging and, ultimately, not very rewarding. He decided to return to coaching only development athletes and competing himself. This can be understood as Steve not experiencing satisfaction through identifying with Rick's striving or by giving support that would enable Rick to succeed.

Athlete and Coach Reflection on Olympic Performance

Rick competed in the Olympics where he threw below the Olympic qualifying standard and was placed well down the finishing order. In our review conversation[9] Rick reported that he approached the Olympic competition feeling confident and relaxed, and that he had followed his planned routine. The crowd noise had an unexpectedly big impact. Although he had mentally prepared for the noise, he was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of fans cheering. Would more rehearsal have been helpful, for example, with crowd noise playing through headphones during a training session? Informal discussion with other athletes and coaches after the Olympics suggested that the crowd noise was initially overwhelming for everyone, regardless of their preparation. By his third and final throw, Rick had learned to tune the noise out, but he was disappointed with his performance and felt tight: "I would rate my performance as average over that period. Out of 10, l would give myself 6."

Looking at Rick's performances through the season, his Olympic performance was very close to his season average. So, while he did not meet his outcome goals for the Olympic final, his performance was consistent with previous results for the season. The Olympic qualifying throw at the final British regional event remained an outlier. Although somewhat disappointed, Rick was positive about his Olympic experience:

One thing I will take away from this all is being able to deal with any issues that ever arise in the future. I learned the ability to compartmentalize challenges and focus on the objective. This was

paramount to my success this season. I have learned a lot about myself and taking away some wonderful memories which l will forever treasure. I have also learned that being an elite athlete is not that difficult provided you have a system that works and a good team around you. Most importantly I learned how to enjoy athletics again.

Coach Steve's assessment of Rick's Olympic performance was that he generally handled himself well and was calm, relaxed, and looking forward to throwing. Based on Rick's technique and previous performances, Rick's best throw was at the upper end of expectations.

SPC Reflection on the Consultancy and Athlete-Coach Relationship Conflict

It is apparent that the conflict in the athlete-coach relationship was a significant factor for both athlete and coach. With the benefit of hindsight and the opportunity to reflect on the rich data generated by athlete, coach, and SPC, this section focuses on the SPC's further reflection and evaluation of the whole consultation. This is based on notes recorded through the work and after the post-Olympics review feedback conversations with Rick(9) and Steve(10). It considers what lessons can be drawn from the SPC's performance in the consultation process with the aim of extracting any insights that might inform future coach-athlete interventions. In addition, it reviews the effectiveness of the PDM materials.

At the beginning of the consultancy the SPC made a bartering arrangement with athlete and coach. It was agreed that he would provide sport psychology support for no fee in exchange for their participation in the case study research. The Association of Applied Sport Psychology's ethics code (Item 10) cautions members about the risks associated with bartering arrangements with clients because such arrangements "create inherent potential for conflicts, exploitation, and distortion of the professional relationship" (Association of Applied Sport Psychology, 2020). In the SPC's arrangement, the risk of exploitation was not just to the clients (athlete and coach), but also to the SPC. Initially, the SPC felt that bartering in this way could produce a creative outcome, resulting in a win/win situation for athlete, coach and himself. However, on reflection post-Olympics, he thought that it made it harder

to manage professional boundaries. From the SPC side, he had too much self-interest invested, which may have held him back from either saying “no” to begin with, or perhaps to challenge Rick and Steve more about their relationship. From the athlete-coach side, he thought it contributed to a high level of compliance and a desire to please by saying what they thought he (as SPC-researcher) wanted to hear.

At the first meeting, both Steve and Rick spoke fulsomely in praise of each other and of the close nature of their relationship. At the time the SPC noted that Steve’s language invariably used the second person “we”. For example, “we go with things we know that we’re both comfortable with, over the winter period we worked extremely hard conditioning Rick for the season ahead; that’s paid off in the gym”. This could have been a sign that Steve was over-invested in the relationship and was emotionally confluent, a potential barrier to effective communication because there is a blurring of boundaries between the individuals in the relationship. Contrary to the old adage, there needs to be an “I” in a team and each individual needs to maintain an appropriate sense of their own needs and identity within the context of a relationship. This supports more effective and authentic communication (Clarkson, 1992). The SPC chose not to comment on this language pattern at the time because he was worried that such an observation might be construed as an uninformed criticism at such an early stage of his working relationship with Rick and Steve.

Neither Rick nor Steve raised their concerns about their deteriorating relationship with the SPC, and indeed the full picture only became apparent during the post-Olympic review. Rick did not raise his concerns about the athlete-coach relationship with the SPC until after qualification at the British regional event. At the time, the SPC asked him why he had waited so long to talk to him about it, and he replied with some embarrassment that he “didn’t want to bother me about it”. When the SPC asked Steve the same question he said “As a coach you kinda think you can get an athlete out of that [lost rhythm]. Maybe it’s a bloke thing too, it’s hard to ask for help”. It is clear from Steve’s feedback[(10)] that he saw Rick's performance challenge as purely technical in nature, and acknowledged that a more experienced coach might have looked to psychological factors as well.

SPCs may be able to resolve athlete-coach conflicts when several enabling conditions are met. First, the SPC needs the requisite skill to facilitate and work with relationship dynamics, rather than teach or consult with individuals. Second, the athlete and coach need to be open to this intervention, so ideally it forms part of the initial contracting. It can be difficult to retrofit this, especially once relationships have become strained. This also requires a sufficient level of psychological safety within the triad, so that people are able to be open and admit their vulnerabilities and concerns (e.g., Nembhard & Edmunson, 2011). This is helped by the SPC establishing a good relationship with both the athlete and coach individually so the relationships are mutual. There is a need to avoid any feeling that the SPC and athlete are "ganging up" on the coach. Or vice-versa, SPC and coach ganging up on athlete. Even with all these conditions in place, the athlete and coach need a sufficient level of emotional maturity to be willing to have difficult conversations, or share challenging feedback, even with the support of a skilled facilitator.

The SPC was both frustrated and disappointed when he learned about these problems as late as he did. However, the SPC made several assumptions which contributed to the situation. First, he underestimated the power differential in the relationship between Steve and himself. Based on previous engagements with more experienced coaches, he assumed a mutual working relationship between coach and SPC in which both parties contribute their expertise in service of the athlete. In this context asking for help is not a sign of weakness, it is an essential aspect of high performance culture. Yet he did not make this working principle explicit and did not fully explore Rick and Steve's views during the initial contracting. Instead, he assumed that either athlete or coach would proactively ask for assistance when needed. Given the difficulties in securing time together, the SPC chose to take Rick and Steve's reports that the pair enjoyed a highly positive and constructive relationship at face value, rather than to seek to develop the foundations of their communication. On reflection it also appears there was a degree of impression management at play with both coach and athlete keen to present an overly positive face to the SPC. Likewise, the SPC was reluctant to offer feedback so early in the working

relationship. This is typical of established working relationships and reduced the quality of interaction (Connor & Pokora, 2010). Well-developed relationships allow all parties to contribute in an honest and forthright manner, raising and explaining concerns without communication being hindered by impression management.

The sport psychology consultation took place in the run-up to an immovable deadline; participation in an Olympic Games. The need to qualify added to this time pressure and a sense of a closing window of opportunity. The SPC entered this situation too late to establish personal working relationships with athlete and coach and the majority of working time was by email or Skype. This was frustrating for the SPC, as it was very difficult to spend enough time building a relationship with both and getting beneath a superficial level of contact, especially with coach Steve. The lack of face-to-face contact reduced the richness of communication and insight that can be gained from non-verbal communication and could have been a factor that prevented earlier attention to the athlete-coach relationship. This is in accord with Tod and Andersen's (2012) suggestion that “practitioners are less effective if they are unable to meet with athletes often enough to resolve client issues” (p. 285).

Balancing the role of researcher and SPC

It is difficult to impose a tightly structured research methodology or timeline of meetings onto elite athletes, therefore there is an emergent quality to applied research. For example, it is rarely possible to package it as neatly as a conventional experiment. Most significantly, there were times when the SPC had to decide between his needs as a researcher and meeting his client's needs. For example, the meeting with Rick in person a few weeks before the Olympics might have provided a useful opportunity to revisit the materials, interview him at length about his experience of the sources of self-confidence, and generally progress the research agenda. In the time available, Rick's urgent and immediate priority was to “get his head straight”. Faced with an ethical dilemma, the SPC's internal priority shifted from research to supporting Rick in his preparation for the Olympics. This was in keeping with the SPC's own ethical stance, in which the well-being of clients needs to be held in the

foreground. It was a decision consistent with Meara and Schmidt's (1991) recommendations that qualitative research should do no harm, and ideally work for the benefit of the participants (see also Jones, Evans, & Mullen, 2007).

Putting Rick's needs first also meant that the SPC chose not to offer to intervene further to help him rebuild his relationship with Steve immediately prior to the Olympics. This was despite the SPC having significant experience facilitating team development sessions, often in conflicted situations, and teamwork (between athlete and coach), being the important fourth psychological fundamental of the PDM. Firstly, there was a lack of any obvious time to do so. Getting diaries to align even for the meeting with Rick after qualification had been difficult and they had been trying unsuccessfully to schedule a three-way meeting for some time. Rick's schedule over the coming weeks was hectic. The SPC had the skills to identify the exact nature of conflict problem, analyze the reasons for its occurrence and develop strategies to manage the conflict between Rick and Steve, in the type of "analyst and action planner" role identified by Jowett and colleagues in research with sport psychology practitioners (Wachsmuth, et al., 2018, 2020). In addition, lack of time was one of the inhibiting factors for effective athlete-coach conflict resolution also identified by Wachsmuth, et al. (2018, 2020). Secondly, the SPC also sensed that Steve was withdrawing from the collaboration between athlete, coach, and SPC, due to his non-availability/unwillingness to meet. In hindsight, the SPC could have made a more sustained effort to contact Steve at the time, but the weight of the factors just described led the SPC to focus his efforts with Rick alone. While the present researchers remain confident that applied qualitative research provides valuable insights, it must also come with a warning that compromise to the research design and rigor will often be necessary, and indeed essential, to maintain the primacy of the SPC-athlete relationship.

The Effectiveness of the PDM Materials

Given that the PDM is a coach-based approach, it was necessary to ensure the coach was engaged from the start of the process of developing a specific PDM for Rick. The intention was that

this process would help to identify priority areas for sport psychology intervention through the season. The PDM materials had a high degree of face validity for Rick and Steve when first introduced, evidenced by their positive response and ability to recognize and give examples from their own experience. The three initially worked through the PDM, focusing on the five days of Olympic competition, based on Rick's self-reported under-performance at the previous year's World Championship. The process of considering pre-event, competition and post-event stages prompted a rich discussion between coach and athlete. It raised several important questions of detail and identified areas where both needed to learn more (e.g., about transit times between the Olympic village and the stadium and about Steve's likely level of access to Rick during the event). Rick later affirmed the usefulness of the materials: "I found all four components of mental performance in my sport. They all assisted me in my preparation towards the games. All materials were clear and coherent. I understood it all and could identify with it comfortably." However, in the review feedback comments[(9)], Rick pointed to the deteriorating relationship with his coach as a problem that the PDM failed to identify:

> The Performance Model described the challenges I faced before the competition, however it also omitted one challenge, which was the challenge of knowing what to do if your support structure was to break down. I faced a challenging season as my coach struggled to assist me in getting my timing back. I lost the feeling for the [projectile] which contributed to massive inconsistency in my competitions. This affected my performance all season and it was something I was not necessary [sic] prepared for.

Coach Steve described the intervention as "useful early on. It was always in the back of my mind". However, as the season progressed and the pressure to qualify increased, Steve's focus shifted to seeking a purely technical solution. As a result, he was able to offer only limited feedback on the utility of the materials.

> I was focusing less on the psychological things or anything else. My main goal was to get him into a rhythm that would allow him to throw a long way. Other things fell by the wayside – it

> wasn't easy for Rick either…. They [psych materials] lost relevance due to the technical focus – it was technique technique technique. I was up to all hours studying [video] footage trying to find a way to get him to relax. I'm a volunteer coach; Rick is the first world class athlete I've coached, so maybe other coaches would have used the psychological tools more. But he had blatant technical faults, and the closer to the Games, the more important this became.

Could the SPC have made more rigorous use of the PDM materials? Rick referred to it several times as a useful guide and the SPC encouraged him to re-visit and update it regularly to remind himself of the sources of confidence. With more contact time, Rick and the SPC could have re-visited it more thoroughly together as the Games approached and used it more specifically to identify the performance demands in that environment, including the breakdown in communication with his coach. It is telling that Steve saw little relevance to the PDM as the season progressed and he became increasingly focused on "fixing" Rick's technical problem. The PDM was deliberately focused on performance at the Olympics, but the immediate challenge facing athlete and coach was to overcome a technical problem and throw the qualifying distance in order to qualify for the Olympics. Thus it is not surprising that materials focused on preparing for the demands of Olympic performance became increasingly irrelevant when qualification was appearing unlikely.

In order to be relevant to emerging demands and issues, the PDM needs regular attention to help predict, and respond to, the dynamic nature of preparation and performance in elite sport. It also needs to be explicitly relevant to the short and medium demands of training and qualification, not just a single high profile competition, such as the Olympics. This may require different versions of the PDM checklist for training and competition and for different competitions. The PDM also needs to explicitly document process, performance, and outcome goals to make it easier to identify differences in emphasis or interpretation and ensure a shared understanding by all relevant parties (Jowett, 2007). In addition to previous research studies (Hudson, Males, & Kerr, 2019; Males, Hudson, & Kerr, 2018, 2020), using the PDM with Rick and Steve fostered useful feedback to aid in its use and ongoing

development.

Conclusion

What can be concluded about the overall success of this consultancy work? Certainly, Rick was successful in achieving his goal of competing in the Olympics and, despite only an average performance, was positive and proud of his achievement. Steve returned to his “comfort zone” of coaching club-level athletes, a bit battered, but perhaps more experienced as a result. The consultancy added to the SPC's knowledge and experience along with some valuable lessons. Jowett's (2007) model of interpersonal factors in athlete-coach relationships proved useful for understanding and interpreting Rick and Steve's relationship conflict. The concepts of closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation were relevant, as were notions of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral expressions of conflict in the present research (Wachsmuth, et al., 2018, 2020). It is hoped that the “thick descriptions" of the SPC's consulting experiences with an elite athlete and coach in this case study have relevance for other applied sport psychologists in their own professional practices.

There are five recommendations to other SPCs that might inform future athlete-coach consultancies and interventions arising from the present case study. These are, be willing to: (1) be as realistic as possible with clients about what can be achieved with limited contact time and decline an engagement if there is insufficient time to create conditions for a meaningful engagement; (2) ensure early in an engagement that both athlete and coach are equipped to offer and receive constructive feedback, not just provide mutual affirmation. This needs to be mutually agreed as part of initial contracting; (3) speak up earlier in response to initial observations or hunches (e.g., with regard to the nature of the athlete-coach relationship); (4) establish equal and separate relationships with athlete and coach, in order to work effectively with their relationship; (5) test the real understanding of an athlete's and coach’s professed understanding of psychological principles.

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Table 1

Chronological list of most important contacts between SPC athlete and/or coach

Type of contact	Key content
Introductory athlete & coach phone calls[1]	Contracting
3-way face-to- face meeting[2]	Agreed goals started to develop PDM
3-way Skype call at end of hard training block[3]	More focus, 4 PB's in the gym
3-way Skype call after US training camp[4]	Reviewed US camp. Coach says we "didn't fully nail heavier projectile technique" Previewed German & British competitions
SPC-athlete phone call 1 week after German & British competitions[5]	Reviewed German & British competitions. Discussed tactics for dealing with disappointment (illness) & re-focusing
SPC-athlete Skype call day after UKA team trials[6]	Post-trials review of attempts to throw Olympic qualifying distance at 3 events
The athlete failed to reach qualifying distance at European Championships, but finally achieves it at a British regional event	
2-way face-to- face meeting SPC-athlete instigated by the athlete[7]	Discussed deteriorating athlete-coach relationship & developed a strategy for pre-Olympics training camp abroad
SPC-athlete Skype call just before Olympic competition[8]	Discussed Olympic environment & "what if" scenarios to build confidence
The athlete threw close to his average distance for the season, but well below gold medal distance. He was initially affected by crowd noise, technically he felt tight, but enjoyed the Olympic experience	
Post-Olympics emails to the athlete by SPC[9] for feedback through formal evaluation questions & follow-up	Reviewed Olympic performance, the sport psychology support & use of PDM materials. Advised that the coach was no longer coaching him
Post-Olympics email & phone call interview with the coach by SPC[10] to obtain feedback through formal evaluation questions. These were asked verbally as he had not looked at them in advance	Reviewed Olympic performance, sport psychology support & use of PDM materials

Table 2

The PDM based on the four psychological fundamentals (mastery motivation, decision making, execution and teamwork). The table shows the key points Rick should focus on at the different stages of a competition (i.e., for the pre-event, competition and post-event periods)

Pre-event (3 days in village)	Competition	Post-event (between qualifying and finals)
Mastery Motivation (Competitive Spirit) Maintain positive focus on own plan and timetable of activities Guard against Village/sponsor distractions Maintain calm, relaxed approach Don't think too much about competition. Stay healthy *Decision Making* Check in with coach regarding any unplanned changes *Teamwork* Talk to coach when needed. Maintain independence in Village environment, eat at own times, avoid uninvited massage treatment, etc. Team mobile phone, so absolute choice over who to speak to in this period *Questions:* Can you find a place to meet outside the Village, in * [name of location]? Do you need to let some people know that you won't be contactable in this period?	*Mastery Motivation (Competitive Spirit)* Stay relaxed, light hearted before throwing. Switch on for warm up Game face on in call room Ignore others' attempts at "games" in call rooms Remind self of the environment and *enjoy* the chance to perform in front of an Olympic crowd *Execution* Habitual – automatic technique 100% focused on executing each position Between throws routine – to be fine-tuned: communication with coach focus on own performance not that of competitors no surprises and always feeling confident because you have worked through different scenarios *Teamwork* Locate coach and maintain visual contact – feedback after each throw	*Mastery Motivation (Competitive Spirit)* Deal with media in the mixed zone Acknowledge and manage own emotional response to performance in qualifying Look after own needs for food, rest, recovery, etc. *Decision Making (Review)* Assess performance and re-commit to excellence Re-engage in planned routine – stay in the moment rather than going into the future *Teamwork* Talk with coach *Questions* Who else do you want to have contact with during this time? Will you need to do anything different to manage distractions in this period? (e.g. additional requests for media interview? Contact from other UKA coaches)? What's your contingency plan if coach becomes unavailable?

Table 3

Final version of athlete's sources of self-confidence questionnaire

Sources of self-confidence	Ideal Strength (1-10)	Current Strength (1-10)
Self		
Feeling like an actor; “I’m going to perform in front of an audience and get a standing ovation”		
See myself as a role model to others		
Technique - ability to execute each position		
Perseverance - knowing that I’m still doing it despite the “dark days”		
My faith		
Knowledge of own past performances		
Relationships		
My coach		
My wife		
Environmental		
Receiving compliments from others, especially other competitors		
Completing high-intensity repetitions in training, especially pre-competition - being “on fire”		
Hitting weight targets in the gym		
Familiarity with other competitors and watching them train - they are no longer on a pedestal		
Positive media coverage		

Athlete-Coach Conflict and a Sport Psychologist Caught in the Middle: A Case Study of Consultancy During Athlete Preparation and Performance in Olympic Games Athletics

Introduction

Sport psychologists have recognized that athlete-coach relationships can affect performance (e.g., Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001). From interviews with Olympic athletes, Greenleaf et al. (2001) found a number of athlete-coach relationship factors that influenced performance. Positive influences were coach contact, trust, and friendship. Negative influences were especially relevant for athletes who did not meet performance expectations and included coach conflict, lack of access to a personal coach, inaccurate coach technical information or technical changes made by a coach, and lack of coach focus on team climate. Other research has supported the view that not all athlete-coach relationships function well and some can become dysfunctional as a result of disagreement or conflict between the two (Jowett, 2003; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; LaVoi, 2007; Wachsmuth, Jowett, & Harwood, 2017). For example, in a case study of an athlete-coach relationship in crisis, Jowett (2003) found differences in the athlete's and coach's perceptions about their athletic relationship and areas of emotional isolation, disagreements, and incompatibility.

Jowett and colleagues' research work (summarized in Jowett, 2007) has used the concepts of *Closeness, Commitment, Complementarity, and Co-orientation* as a means of examining the interpersonal relationships that exist between athletes and coaches. Here, closeness deals with affective aspects of the relationship, the emotions involved, and, for example, feelings of trust. Commitment is the cognitive element and reflects the athlete's and coach's long term orientation to their relationship. Complementarity represents behavioral aspects and can be seen in their ongoing reciprocal cooperation during training and at competition. Co-orientation was added to cover the athlete's and coach's interpersonal perceptions and indicates the degree to which they have established a real understanding in their relationship. In many ways, athlete and coach are dependent on each other and considering their

closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation gives an indication of the strength of that interdependence (Jowett, 2007). Later work (Wachsmuth, Jowett, & Harwood, 2018) focused on the specific nature of athlete-coach interpersonal conflict and examined practical applications useful for sport psychology consultants (SPCs) in dealing with athlete-coach conflict. After interviewing different coaches and athletes, Wachsmuth et al. (2018) found that participants understood and interpreted interpersonal conflict in different ways and this influenced how any conflict further developed. Participants described differences in: the intensity, duration, and frequency of conflict; the timing and location of conflict; and the onset, escalation and, in some cases, management of conflict. Findings also indicated that when cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of athlete-coach interpersonal conflict were taken into account, negative conflict appraisals and poor communication could, for example, lead to uncertainty, escalation, and withdrawal responses. In addition, Wachsmuth, et al., (2020), investigated how SPCs prevented and/or managed coach-athlete conflict and the challenges SPCs faced in this type of work. They identified six different roles that SPCs could play in dealing with athlete-coach conflict. These included roles aimed at: preventing conflict in general, identifying, analyzing, and developing strategies to manage specific conflict situations; counselling either athlete or coach individually, or facilitating the development of open and honest communication between the two; and maintaining a healthy athletic environment by being aware of and managing any dysfunctional interaction between athlete and coach. Other conceptual models have been proposed (e.g., LaVoi, 2007; Poczwardowski, Henschen, & Barott, 2002), but the authors considered Jowett and colleagues' model and research work to be the most comprehensive and useful for understanding and interpreting the athlete-coach conflict in the present case study reported below.

Case studies can allow practitioners to assess their effectiveness and evaluate their interventions in a real-world context, helping develop evidence-based practice for future use by themselves and other practitioners (Anderson et al., 2002; Gardner & Moore, 2006). The purpose of the present case study was to: (1) provide an understanding of the personal experiences of an SPC, a male

elite athlete and male coach during the athlete's preparation and performance in a recent Olympic Games; (2) detail how the consultancy process was affected by the athlete's late admission of his deteriorating relationship with his coach, using Jowett's (2007) model for comparison; (3) describe the sport psychology interventions implemented by the SPC, evaluate their effectiveness and examine and evaluate the SPC's professional practice methods; (4) use the basic Performance Demand Model (PDM; e.g., Hudson, Males, & Kerr, 2019) *to provide an applied perspective.*

Method

Participants

Rick (pseudonym) was a male track and field athlete (throwing event) who was aspiring to selection in the Great Britain (GB) team for the Olympic Games. In order to qualify for the Olympic team Rick needed to throw the International Amateur Athletics Federation (IAAF) A-standard, as well as finish in the top 2 or 3 at the National trials. Rick was disappointed with his performance at a recent World championships and believed that his mental preparation for major events needed to improve. His coach, Steve (pseudonym) was relatively inexperienced as a coach, but was a former athlete in the same event. The SPC was a former International athlete and Olympic coach with extensive experience of applied sport psychology work with Olympic and Paralympic athletes and coaches. He fulfilled the dual role of SPC and researcher. As an SPC, his focus was on supporting the athlete during his preparation for the Olympics and, as a researcher his aim was to carry out the case study research according to established procedures in qualitative research (e.g., Hodge *& Sharp, 2016; Yi*n, 1994). The research had beeen planned prior to contact with athlete and coach. The biographical details of athlete and coach have been kept to a minimum. Age, dates, locations of athletics events, and throwing distances have not been included to protect the confidentiality of athlete and coach. This includes the verbatim example quotes included below, where place names, words or terms have been deleted.

Data Collection, Interpretation and Methodological Rigor

Data was collected from the face-to-face meetings, Skype conferences and phone contacts

between the SPC and Rick and/or Steve which were recorded and later transcribed verbatim. In addition, the SPC maintained his own written notes. Rick also kept a training log that he made available to the SPC. The SPC later interpreted the data on Rick's pre- and Olympic experience, including his performances and deteriorating relationship with Steve, as well as post-Olympic reflections by Rick, Steve and himself. The SPC also evaluated the effectiveness of his intervention and his overall role as an SPC. The methodological rigor (following guidelines by Smith & McGannon, 2017) of the present research was enhanced by the following: (1) the case study methodology allowed for multiple sources of information about ongoing training and competitions from athlete, coach and SPC to be collected (Tracy, 2010); (2) detailed description of data collected and subsequent interpretation, supported by quotations from Rick and Steve were provided; (3) Rick and Steve were asked for their reflections post-Olympic Games to enhance the understanding of their experiences (Smith & McGannon, 2017); (4) triangulation was provided in the form of professional supervision of the study (Author, 2013) by two sports psychologists, both with over 25 years of experience in qualitative research. They critically examined the data and interpretation and provided feedback for the SPC to consider and act on where necessary; (5) reflection by the SPC formed an integral part of the data analysis and interpretation process (Cropley & Hanton, 2012), and (6) the SPC had considerable previous experience of undertaking qualitative research, as well as in providing services for athletes in previous Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Case Background and Chronology

The SPC was introduced to Rick via a mutual acquaintance and agreed to provide a program of sport psychology support at no fee, in return for Rick and Steve's participation in this case study research. There was a total of 39 contacts between SPC, athlete and/or coach. Superscript numbers in brackets below refer to the most important contacts (see Table 1). Contracting was agreed on by phone[(1)] and the first face-to-face meeting took place with athlete and coach a month later[(2)]. They both completed a British University informed consent form at this time. Due to Rick’s training and travel

schedule, subsequent interaction occurred predominantly through Skype conference calls and email.

The next scheduled contact was a three-way Skype call(3) between Rick, Steve and the SPC. This came at the end of a hard training block, during which Rick achieved four different personal bests in the gym on four different exercises. Soon after that Rick and Steve travelled to a training camp in the US where he also competed in his first two competitions of the season. Another Skype call(4) was focused on reviewing the training camp and looking ahead to two important competitions (one in Germany and one in Britain) held on consecutive days. Rick and Steve planned to use these events to replicate the Olympic competition format of qualifications and a final. Rick and the SPC spoke by phone(5) a week after these competitions. Rick was ill at the first competition but managed his third best competitive distance of the season. He competed again the next day, but his throws were still under the Olympic qualifying distance.

A Skype call with Rick(6) occurred again the day after the United Kingdom Athletics (UKA) team trials. In the intervening few weeks Rick had competed in three competitions in an attempt to throw the Olympic qualifying distance. His performances were all below his season average. He had only finished third in the trials, which meant that his place in the Olympic team was still conditional on throwing the required distance. Rick was due to fly to the European Championships where he subsequently failed again. He had one last opportunity to qualify at a British regional athletics meet where he performed well and secured his place on Team GB for the Olympics. The next significant contact was a face-to-face meeting(7) with the SPC instigated by Rick and attended by him alone. Rick reported that his relationship with Steve had become strained and, despite his qualification for the Games, his mood was negative. They spoke at length about the situation and developed a strategy for the forthcoming pre-Games training camp abroad.

The final contact before the Games was a Skype conversation(8). Rick and the SPC talked at length about the Olympic environment and his performance plan. The SPC also proposed a range of "what-if" scenarios to ensure that Rick felt confident in the face of unexpected events. Rick competed

in the Olympics and threw well below the gold medal winning distance. The SPC received post-Olympics review feedback from Rick[9] through formal evaluation and follow-up questions regarding his Olympic experience the consultation/intervention process and the PDM materials used. As part of this feedback Rick advised the SPC that Steve was no longer acting as his coach. The SPC also received post-Olympics review feedback from Steve[10] on Rick's Olympic performance, the consultation/intervention process, and the PDM materials used.

Use of the PDM

The PDM **which has its roots in Reversal Theory *(Apter, 1982, 2001; Kerr, 1997, in sport),*** takes *a* process view of performance in sport based on four psychological fundamentals: *mastery motivation*, *decision making*, *execution*, *teamwork*, confirmed by research evidence from athletes and coaches (Hudson, Males, & Kerr, 2019; Males, Hudson, & Kerr, 2018, 2020). It provides a working model of the relationship between mental state and sports performance. The PDM has:

> a generic framework, adaptable to the dynamic processes and transitions involved in a range of sports. It is relevant for both applied sport psychologists and coaches set in a coach-friendly sport psychology framework with the aim of benefitting competitive performance. In practice, use of the PDM begins with the athlete and coach identifying the specific psychological demands to be faced, and successfully overcome, through the different stages of their event. Coaches and athletes are then invited to generate their own solutions to a commonly agreed, understood and contextualized set of challenges across pre-event, competition, and post-event stages of competition in what is a natural process of learning and adaption (Males, Hudson, & Kerr, 2020).

Before the first meeting, the SPC sent Rick and Steve a copy of the PDM Fundamentals document (see Table 2) then explained the material in more detail at the meeting. The SPC asked them both to adapt and validate a final PDM checklist focusing on the five days of Olympic competition. They then completed a sources of self-confidence questionnaire (see Table 3). The SPC took notes throughout the meeting that were typed up as a first draft PDM checklist that was returned to Rick and

Steve the next day for feedback and validation. They were asked to inform the SPC of: (a) anything that needed to be changed or added so that it captured the key points; and (b) any other aspects they felt were less than 100% relevant for his specific event. The final version of the PDM checklist is shown in Figure 1. The SPC also asked Rick to rate the relative priority of each of the sources of self-confidence by rating: (a) the ideal strength for each source, on a 1 to 10 scale (where 10 is absolutely important and you need it to be 100%, and (b) how you currently feel about each one, again on a 1 to 10 scale. The reason for this exercise was to be rigorous in paying attention to the sources that gave Rick the most confidence, and to increase the level of control and influence over the things that could make the most difference to performance. The SPC suggested that they re-visit the final PDM checklist every couple of weeks.

Findings and Discussion

SPC's Interpretive Commentary

The text in the SPC interpretive commentary is presented in a reflexive, personalized, discursive style as suggested by Leavitt et al. (2018) in their recommendations for reporting qualitative research findings to the American Psychological Association's Publications and Communications Board Task Force. This style is used to allow readers to get a real-life, authentic understanding of the feelings, reactions, and experiences of the athlete, coach, and SPC as events evolved during the research period. Where relevant, reference is made to aspects of Jowett's (2007; Wachsmuth, et al. 2018, 2020) conceptual model of interpersonal factors which affect athlete-coach relationships. The intention was to integrate the findings of the sport psychology consultancy with an athlete and coach preparing for Olympic competition with an established theoretical approach, helpful in understanding the dynamics of their athlete-coach relationship.

Interpreting athlete Rick's experience.

Rick and Steve had a clear idea of the distance needed to be “in the medal zone” at the Olympics so, should Rick throw to his full potential, reaching the final was a realistic goal. Although

the performance goals and distance targets were clear and unambiguous, Rick and Steve both emphasized the importance of focusing on technical process goals, in this case “hitting every position at 100%”. Rick articulated the view that “If I execute well, the distance will take care of itself”. I was struck by the serious and professional approach of the athlete and coach, their attention to detail and emphasis on the importance of technique. Rick expressed confidence in Steve’s approach:

> He believes I can beat anybody in the world and with that he absolutely transfers that enthusiasm and passion through me and I bring out his model and his thoughts about how to throw a [projectile] in the field. Without him I don’t think I would have thrown it as far as I have and be the man, the athlete that I am today. He’s done a lot of work with me, for me, and I think because of his background, the training style, the methodology, the strategies he implements have played a significant part in our success. I like routine, I love familiarity, and on being able to be familiar with your environment and having a strategy, having a plan, and Steve has that in abundance.

In terms of Jowett's (2007) athlete-coach interpersonal relationship factors, the SPC's early impression was that both Rick and Steve had a serious and professional approach with clear and unambiguous performance and process targets, attention to detail, and emphasis on the importance of technique, all of which suggested long-term commitment and co-orientation. Also, elements of Rick's quote immediately above suggested that the closeness of the athlete-coach relationship was strong.

In the three-way Skype call[(3)] at the end of the hard training block, in which Rick achieved four different personal bests in the gym, I asked him to explain what was different during the training block. Rick said:

> What I found that week once I looked backed was that each previous day I had mentally prepared my mind for big lifts [sic] in the gym. I approached the session knowing what I needed to do and what l wanted to do. As a consequence of this, nothing came to me as a surprise and hence I committed to each lift. Furthermore, I also applied the same tactic physically too. In effect, I made sure I had enough to eat that week, had all the relevant supplements at the right times and

increased the dosage where I needed to and, more importantly, made sure that I recovered well. So I went to bed early before the heavy day and on the day of the heavy lifts.

I explained how this description was consistent with an enhanced focus on mastery motivation (PDM), summed up by an expression Rick used that he had to "leave tiredness at the door" before a training session. Mastery motivation is characterized by an attitude to training and competition that is professional, goal-directed, and positive. The athlete is intrinsically motivated as they base their competence judgments on mastery of process goals and not competition outcomes, enabling them to approach and seek out competition as a challenge, and as a way to demonstrate competence. This orientation resonates with similar ideas drawn together by Conroy, Eliot, and Coatsworth (2007) in their integration of achievement motivation theory (e.g., McClelland, 1987) and self-determination theory (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000). Examples of positive indicators of mastery motivation include appropriate focus on pre-competition preparation, and example negative indicators include a lack of self-efficacy. Rick also identified additional sources of self-confidence: "work colleagues who are impressed with my level of drive; world class lifting in the gym; content with my life; and being a role model to younger throwers in our training group". **Most of these sources can be seen to reinforce Rick's mastery motivation, apart from the first and last that are based on social comparison rather than being self-referenced.**

We concluded the call by talking about Rick's goals for the forthcoming training camp in the US, which were to make the transition to a heavier projectile (he used a lighter projectile in pre-season training), hit his technical positions consistently, and not "chase distance". These goals were all consistent with the definition of mastery motivation as they were self-referenced process goals that provided clear steps towards successful competitive performances. Following the conversation, I again updated the PDM checklist and sent it to Rick by email. Rick's feedback was:

I have looked at the format of the performance model and I think it's very accurate and relates to me well . . . .Would you like me to use this model on a weekly basis so that I can see and measure

how well and how far I am away from it? I really like it because it gives a clear indication of where I am and where I want to be.

Rick had a positive experience at the US camp in April. He received complimentary feedback from other competitors and from the UKA Performance Director, and believed he made good technical progress, especially with the move to a heavier projectile. The following report came at the end of the camp just before returning to the UK:

> My training performance has got better and better. Technically hitting the right positions, doing some exciting things which surprised Steve and myself. We have learned a lot out here. We know now even more that it is important we train heavy during this period and ensure we peak at the right time. I know looking at the guys throwing [further than me] that I am not too far from them. I learned the first round throw is very important and has a massive impact on the group [of] athletes I am with so it is important I execute that well. We also learned that I compete well and manage pressure well. I was in a very competitive environment this weekend, both Thursday and Saturday when world leading distances were thrown and it did not faze me because I know we have a plan, and more importantly, I believe in our plan.

Rick's language is inclusive of Steve and suggests that their relationship was still on a firm footing. Rick's throwing performances were receiving compliments from important observers and they were both excited by Rick's technical progress, suggesting that Steve's coaching advice was working, and Rick was very confident about their plan which appeared to be paying off. In thinking about Jowett's (2007) model, the indications were that complimentarity could now be added to closeness, commitment, and co-orientation as factors underlying their still apparently well-functioning relationship.

Throughout this period Rick reported that he was also pleased with his performance in the two outdoor US competitions:

> I felt a little nervous going into it [the first competition] as it was a seeded event with which I was

> put into the top seed with throwers who had done 3-4 comps already and were in a peak period of their training. Albeit a [bit] tight in the movement, however, technically it was not too bad. One of the main things I took away was the fact that my first round throw was the one [I] nailed and had a few of the competitors shocked. More so, because my warm-ups were not great. I was over the moon with that, as that is something we have been working on. I took a lot of confidence from this competition because I know I am in heavy training and I know once I sharpen up I will be beating these guys.

Up to this point Rick had been making good progress and was feeling positive. This changed dramatically after a German competition. A week after this competition, Rick reported(5) that his last training session before leaving was poor – he "forgot how to throw" and his timing was out. He had also picked up a minor calf strain. On the morning of the German competition, he awoke feeling ill, but chose to compete anyway. However, he finished in the top ten with his third best competitive distance of the season. He then returned to the UK to compete the next day where he performed poorly. He was deeply frustrated at the lost opportunities to reach the qualifying standard, as well as feeling upset about his illness.

I had noticed that both he and Steve tended to be highly optimistic and positive. My assessment of the situation was that Rick needed to acknowledge the depth of his feelings about the German event rather than try too hard to be positive too soon. I advised him to take the time to identify and express his feelings using a journal or a private place to talk out loud about the event and give full vent to his frustration. I explained that emotions are natural and that they can and do change quickly, and a negative emotion lasting this long after the cause was due to the situation being mentally "re-visited" (Watkins, 2009).

The day after the UKA team trials, we spoke again(6) and, despite feeling more positive about his experience at the German competition since our last conversation, he reported feeling slow and "like a robot" when throwing, and feeling deeply frustrated as a consequence. His performances were

all below his season average. He described his performance at the trials as “all or nothing” and better technically but still “slow in the middle”. Rick was trying too hard, thus interfering with the automatic execution of his technique and “in the moment” awareness during execution (PDM).

Rick was due to fly the next day for the European Championships. **Based on my previous experience with other Olympic athletes**, I advised that he keep his focus on his immediate challenge, to trust his technique, to enjoy the competition and to allow himself to throw well. Rick’s performance was below the Olympic standard, but he had one last opportunity to qualify at a regional athletic meeting back in the UK where he achieved the necessary distance and secured his place on Team GB for the forthcoming Olympic games.

In Rick’s own words:

> . . . . my mental approach was massively different; I went in with a do or die attitude and really drilled in what I felt would work for me. Although Steve was there, he didn't talk to me. Actually, before I competed, he told my wife that it was over and that I was not going to the Games…. Equally, this season has also taught me how powerful the mind is and to switch on the facets to get the best out of me. At [this competition] I made the decision to succeed before I went to the comp and I did. That alone changed my approach to the competition.

His comments suggest that he was not reliant on support from his coach and was able to maintain a strong focus that drove his determination to succeed. The “do or die” focus on strong execution (PDM) was also notable, and markedly different from the earlier stated attitude of focusing on technique and letting the distance take care of itself. The SPC had seen the "do or die" approach work with other performers, but it was not ideal, consistent, or replicable and required the right external circumstances (e. g., a last-chance scenario). The situation with Rick was compounded by the environment. It was a local British regional athletics meet, not an international event. So there was less at play in terms of crowds, status, reputation and, as the SPC would find out later, the wind and flight conditions also gave athletes a big advantage. It was hard to decide how much a "do or die" approach had to do with the

actual distance thrown. It remained an outlier for Rick's whole season.

It was also apparent from his comments that Rick's relationship with Steve had started to unravel. This was likely prompted by his poor performances prior to the last regional meet and his final attempt at successful Olympic qualification. Communication had broken down and Steve had lost confidence in Rick's ability to throw the qualifying distance, illustrated by his comment to Rick's wife. Also, at that last regional competition, Rick deviated from the agreed plan that had previously been so important to them both, adopting a different approach. Fortunately, that approach worked. However, at this stage it became clear that the apparently high levels of closeness, commitment, co-orientation, and complimentarity (Jowett, 2007) that had characterized their prior athlete-coach relationship were severly under threat, if not much reduced.

Our next significant contact was a face-to-face meeting[7]. Rick requested this meeting and he attended without Steve. He appeared troubled and expressed his concerns about his relationship with Steve. Rick was not confident about Steve's ability to support him through the Games, because Steve seemed unable to offer helpful coaching input to address the problems with his technique and timing that had persisted since the beginning of the competitive season. Rick also believed that Steve was losing confidence, which was reflected in Steve reducing his own energy and commitment. Rick had originally listed his relationship with Steve as an important source of confidence. This negative example illustrates the important role effective teamwork (PDM) plays in supporting an athlete's self-confidence. The deteriorating relationship contributed to Rick's overall mood, which he described as frustrated, joyless, and stressed. This meeting revealed the breakdown in the athlete-coach relationship to the SPC and the extent of the breakdown was confirmed by the fact that Steve did not attend. According to Jowett (2007), athlete-coach relationships that result in conflict can lead to antisocial or self-interested behavior, hostile thoughts, or one party seeking to disadvantage or make gains to the detriment of the other. This in turn can lead to further escalation of the conflict. Rick and Steve did not have an argument resulting in acrimonious conflict. It was more that by degrees their relationship

became dissonant and largely dysfunctional and Rick decided to work on his own. Rick's feelings about Steve's coaching and commitment had clearly changed and this he found unpleasant. It was clear that their athletic relationship had broken down on cognitive, emotional and behavioral levels (Jowett, 2007).

My realistic interpretation was that Rick had become too fixated on achieving technical excellence and was trying too hard and that this was leading to too much conscious processing and interference with his technique (Carver & Schemer, 1988). Consequently, his ability to execute (PDM) was impaired. This was feeding his dissatisfaction with Steve so that it created a negative spiral in Rick's confidence. Rather than feeling energized and looking forward to the Games (effective mastery motivation (PDM)), Rick was experiencing the journey as a problem to be solved – essentially the same pattern we had talked about earlier in the season. This attitude appeared to have become more entrenched, with negative consequences for Rick's energy and engagement. We spoke at length about the situation and I offered this formulation to Rick, emphasizing the need for him to refocus his mastery motivation now that he had achieved qualification, and find ways of re-capturing his enjoyment for the sport.

Here is the follow-up note I sent Rick the next day, reflecting on our meeting:

> It was good to sit and talk with you yesterday, and even if our time was shorter than hoped I felt like it was worthwhile. I trust it was for you. You've done the hard job – that was qualification. The mindset that got you there isn't now the right mindset for the Games. Take some time to relax, to laugh, to have some FUN. You need to re-set your brain to get out of the unproductive cycle of trying hard to get your technique right – and getting frustrated. Your technique is already right, you've spent years getting it right, and it's now time to get the effortful striving, serious part of yourself out of the way. That doesn't mean that you become any less professional. It simply means that continuing to try hard will make things worse. Instead remember the feeling and tap into the JOY of throwing a [projectile], of watching it fly and hang in the air. And imagine how

much fun it will be to experience that in the Games. The distance and the results will then take care of themselves. You don't have to win every training session; some will go well and others won't. Trust in yourself. Enjoy what you do. Appreciate the opportunity that you've worked so hard to create. And now is not the time to make any long-term decisions about working with Steve. Focus on getting as much as you can from the relationship, without being over-reliant. I'm happy to talk more about this if it helps, particularly to help you think through your plans for Games time. The real beauty of sport is what it teaches us about ourselves. You're learning really important things through this period, and the full implications will only reveal themselves over the years ahead.

Go well!

Rick responded a few days later:

The time we spent was very useful. I found it worthwhile and also a bit of a relief to take a lot of things off my chest. When I left you on Sunday evening l felt better straight away.

I took your direction on Sunday and relaxed and chilled with [wife's name], we watched movies and had a laugh. I felt mentally better and happier. I did not think about athletics or the Games for that day. Strangely enough it felt good. You are right in saying l know how to throw and l need to bring back the fun element back into my life and that is what l intend to do.

There are two aspects to this intervention. By allowing Rick to talk openly about his concerns I was able to help him renew his confidence in his approach – refreshing his decision making (PDM) capability. The conversation also helped Rick recognize and accept the need to sometimes be playful (e.g., “watching a movie and having a laugh”) rather than spending most, if not all, his time being serious. The benefits were still apparent when Rick reported from the GB team’s pre-Olympic training camp, from where he sent this e-mail:

Hope all is well. Apologies for not updating you recently. Life has been manic of late.

So far things have been going well. Training is a lot better. I'm doing things that make me happy

and I am enjoying myself very much. I feel so much lighter mentally and a lot more relieved for some reason. Steve is out here with us too although he is in a different hotel. He seems to have re-discovered his appetite again. He is very positive and excited again. He talked about not getting any kit so I gave him a couple of shirts and I think that has helped make him better. All in all, I am in a better place than I have been and just as focused and relaxed as we approach entering the village. I'm spending a lot of time in my room as I want to continue this precedence in the village. Thanks for all your help recently. Hopefully speak soon.

Rick's quote above suggests that the disconnection in his athlete-coach relationship with Steve had been repaired and re-established to some extent. There was no evidence to suggest what might have prompted this positive upturn, but it might be assumed that Rick's Olympic qualification was the cause.

The next important contact was via Skype[8] when we talked at length about the Olympic environment and his performance plan. We also considered a range of "what-if" scenarios to ensure that Rick felt confident in the face of unexpected events. This forms another important component of effective decision making (PDM), by rationally preparing for a wide range of eventualities. He reported feeling confident and relaxed, and looking forward to competing in the Olympics.

Interpreting coach Steve's experience

As the athlete-coach conflict played out, I had more contact with Rick than with Steve and that is reflected in the findings. **S**teve was initially involved in all our meetings and conversations, and he was consistently positive and optimistic in his assessment of the working relationship and Rick's progress at the time. When we all spoke just prior to the US training camp[4], Steve claimed that Rick was "on fire" and expressed great satisfaction at Rick's technical improvements as well as the gym performances. He expressed confidence that everything was on track and that the distances would come. A month later he spoke of the strength of their working partnership as a core source of confidence for Rick:

I think our overall preparation, and we are incredibly professional in our preparation and we

> discuss these things together as a team. It's not just a one-way-traffic kind of relationship that we have. We discuss things, we talk about things, this is how we want to do it, this is what works. If it ain't broke we never ever try and fix it, and we go with things we know that we're both comfortable with.

When reviewing the US camp and preparing for the events in Germany and Britain, used to replicate the Olympic competition format, Steve alluded to "not having quite nailed the technique" with the heavier projectile in the US. Yet, he was confident of progress and believed that Rick was "clicking into his rhythm" evidenced by "the best outdoor technical sessions yet". This positive assessment contrasted with his views at the end of the season, when he said:

> The first half of the season, while we were training indoors, was beyond expectations. The second half, maybe 5 or 6 out of 10. There was a dividing line, when we came outdoors with the training camp in [place name]. The quality of winter training probably meant that Rick put his expectations too high and he became distance- rather than technically-focused. Indoors he performed into a net so he never saw the outcome (i.e., distance). In February we were training (indoors) and the current world champ came to watch us train. He was impressed and said 'there's nothing to improve technically'. So we were ahead of expectations. Every session (indoors) Rick was on the orbit, feeling relaxed. Once he went outdoors he got very tense and the orbit was too flat. I tried everything to get him to relax more – maybe it was the pressure of the Games. He just kept trying harder. And in this sport the harder you try the worse it gets.

Steve found this situation increasingly frustrating because he was unable to help Rick regain his timing and rhythm. To compound this, Steve described Rick as "going into a shell" and reducing the level and quality of communication. By the time of the European championships, Steve believed that Rick had stopped listening to him and was essentially "on his own". Steve also felt that Rick was starting to blame him for the situation. Steve framed this situation purely as a technical problem and made no connection with any psychological factors other than Rick was now "trying too hard" and had

become obsessed with distance rather than technique:

> As the season went on communication began to break down. I worked extremely hard, going up to [town name] four times a week, and I wasn't always looking forward to it. Our relationship wasn't breaking down, but it wasn't good.

This description suggests that Steve experienced coaching as a chore rather than a rewarding challenge. The attributes of mastery motivation (PDM) are just as relevant for coaches, who also need to access a sense of positive challenge.

Steve's assessment of Rick's performance at the crucial final regional event is significantly different from Rick's. Technically, Steve believed that Rick's throws at the regional event were not as good as at the European Championships or his final throw at the Olympic Games. Steve claimed that the regional event stadium was extremely favorable for Rick's event. He gave the example of another athlete who also increased his personal best performance significantly on the same evening. This marked discrepancy between coach and athlete assessment was not identified at the time, nor was it discussed later. It is likely that both felt a sense of relief that the Olympic dream remained alive and Steve saw no reason to be critical of Rick's success, especially given Steve's frustration that Rick was no longer listening to him.

Coach Steve's comments in the section above provide confirmation of the SPC's initial impression of the breakdown in the athlete-coach relationship, elaborating somewhat on Rick's view of its status. Good two-way interpersonal communication is necessary for effective coaching (Jowett, 2007; La Voi, 2007) and Steve's perception was that, at the two athletic meets before the Olympics he was no longer getting through to Rick, who had stopped listening. In Jowett's (2007) model, communication is considered a means to establish a functional athlete-coach relationship and, in turn, that relationship can then affect communication positively or negatively. For Rick and Steve the lack of productive communication reflected the breakdown in their relationship and the subsequent negative feelings. In addition, Steve's perception was that Rick was also blaming him for the relationship

disconnect which was failing on all four factors (closeness, commitment co-orientation and complimentarity), and on affective, cognitive and behavioral levels (Jowett, 2007; Wachsmuth, et al., 2020).

Athlete Reflection on Relationship with Coach

The coach–athlete relationship was an important factor for Rick, which changed significantly through the season. Rick described the relationship in these terms at our initial meeting: “My coach believes in me and has faith in me, that’s the number one and most important thing, he inspires me by the fact that he has unshakable belief in my ability”. Rick also listed his coach as an important source of self-confidence and regular contact with the coach was the core factor within the teamwork dimension of the PDM. Yet, when asked to nominate the most important sources of confidence during the Games, Rick did not mention his coach, instead nominating: “The sources of confidence which were most important to me were ones from my faith, my wife, my family friends, sponsors and the media”. The SPC also noticed during the post-Olympics review feedback conversations with Rick and Steve[9&10] that they offered different answers to the question “What was the main competitive focus for the season?” Steve said, “to produce a good technical performance at the Olympic Games; if that happens then we’ll come away with a respectable distance”, which indicates a process goal orientation. Rick’s goals were to throw the A standard for the Olympics, win or come top two at the Olympic Trials, make the Olympic final and then achieve well over the qualifying distance in the final. These are all outcome or performance goals. This is an important difference that can be seen to underlie the tension and lack of complementarity (Jowett, 2007) that developed between coach and athlete.

However, at the Games themselves Rick reported that Steve was relaxed and the relationship had improved from a low point prior to qualification. Nevertheless, Rick had limited contact with Steve, much less than described as necessary when I first met them. When reviewing his whole season Rick described the coaching relationship as a source of distraction:

This [breakdown] hindered my performance initially as I struggled to focus and at times my

energy was directed at fixing the structure as opposed to focusing on the task at hand which was to focus on getting my timing right.

When we spoke post-Olympics[10], it was apparent that Steve found the process of working with Rick extremely challenging and, ultimately, not very rewarding. He decided to return to coaching only development athletes and competing himself. This can be understood as Steve not experiencing satisfaction through identifying with Rick's striving or by giving support that would enable Rick to succeed.

Athlete and Coach Reflection on Olympic Performance

Rick competed in the Olympics where he threw below the Olympic qualifying standard and was placed well down the finishing order. In our review conversation[9] Rick reported that he approached the Olympic competition feeling confident and relaxed, and that he had followed his planned routine. The crowd noise had an unexpectedly big impact. Although he had mentally prepared for the noise, he was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of fans cheering. Would more rehearsal have been helpful, for example, with crowd noise playing through headphones during a training session? Informal discussion with other athletes and coaches after the Olympics suggested that the crowd noise was initially overwhelming for everyone, regardless of their preparation. By his third and final throw, Rick had learned to tune the noise out, but he was disappointed with his performance and felt tight: "I would rate my performance as average over that period. Out of 10, l would give myself 6."

Looking at Rick's performances through the season, his Olympic performance was very close to his season average. So, while he did not meet his outcome goals for the Olympic final, his performance was consistent with previous results for the season. The Olympic qualifying throw at the final British regional event remained an outlier. Although somewhat disappointed, Rick was positive about his Olympic experience:

One thing I will take away from this all is being able to deal with any issues that ever arise in the future. I learned the ability to compartmentalize challenges and focus on the objective. This was

paramount to my success this season. I have learned a lot about myself and taking away some wonderful memories which l will forever treasure. I have also learned that being an elite athlete is not that difficult provided you have a system that works and a good team around you. Most importantly I learned how to enjoy athletics again.

Coach Steve's assessment of Rick's Olympic performance was that he generally handled himself well and was calm, relaxed, and looking forward to throwing. Based on Rick's technique and previous performances, Rick's best throw was at the upper end of expectations.

SPC Reflection on the Consultancy and Athlete-Coach Relationship Conflict

It is apparent that the conflict in the athlete-coach relationship was a significant factor for both athlete and coach. With the benefit of hindsight and the opportunity to reflect on the rich data generated by athlete, coach, and SPC, this section focuses on the SPC's further reflection and evaluation of the whole consultation. This is based on notes recorded through the work and after the post-Olympics review feedback conversations with Rick(9) and Steve(10). It considers what lessons can be drawn from the SPC's performance in the consultation process with the aim of extracting any insights that might inform future coach-athlete interventions. In addition, it reviews the effectiveness of the PDM materials.

At the beginning of the consultancy the SPC made a bartering arrangement with athlete and coach. It was agreed that he would provide sport psychology support for no fee in exchange for their participation in the case study research. The Association of Applied Sport Psychology's ethics code (Item 10) cautions members about the risks associated with bartering arrangements with clients because such arrangements "create inherent potential for conflicts, exploitation, and distortion of the professional relationship" (Association of Applied Sport Psychology, 2020). In the SPC's arrangement, the risk of exploitation was not just to the clients (athlete and coach), but also to the SPC. Initially, the SPC felt that bartering in this way could produce a creative outcome, resulting in a win/win situation for athlete, coach and himself. However, on reflection post-Olympics, he thought that it made it harder

to manage professional boundaries. From the SPC side, he had too much self-interest invested, which may have held him back from either saying “no” to begin with, or perhaps to challenge Rick and Steve more about their relationship. From the athlete-coach side, he thought it contributed to a high level of compliance and a desire to please by saying what they thought he (as SPC-researcher) wanted to hear.

At the first meeting, both Steve and Rick spoke fulsomely in praise of each other and of the close nature of their relationship. At the time the SPC noted that Steve’s language invariably used the second person “we”. For example, “we go with things we know that we’re both comfortable with, over the winter period we worked extremely hard conditioning Rick for the season ahead; that’s paid off in the gym”. This could have been a sign that Steve was over-invested in the relationship and was emotionally confluent, a potential barrier to effective communication because there is a blurring of boundaries between the individuals in the relationship. Contrary to the old adage, there needs to be an “I” in a team and each individual needs to maintain an appropriate sense of their own needs and identity within the context of a relationship. This supports more effective and authentic communication (Clarkson, 1992). The SPC chose not to comment on this language pattern at the time because he was worried that such an observation might be construed as an uninformed criticism at such an early stage of his working relationship with Rick and Steve.

Neither Rick nor Steve raised their concerns about their deteriorating relationship with the SPC, and indeed the full picture only became apparent during the post-Olympic review. Rick did not raise his concerns about the athlete-coach relationship with the SPC until after qualification at the British regional event. At the time, the SPC asked him why he had waited so long to talk to him about it, and he replied with some embarrassment that he “didn’t want to bother me about it”. When the SPC asked Steve the same question he said “As a coach you kinda think you can get an athlete out of that [lost rhythm]. Maybe it’s a bloke thing too, it’s hard to ask for help”. It is clear from Steve’s feedback[(10)] that he saw Rick's performance challenge as purely technical in nature, and acknowledged that a more experienced coach might have looked to psychological factors as well.

SPCs may be able to resolve athlete-coach conflicts when several enabling conditions are met. First, the SPC needs the requisite skill to facilitate and work with relationship dynamics, rather than teach or consult with individuals. Second, the athlete and coach need to be open to this intervention, so ideally it forms part of the initial contracting. It can be difficult to retrofit this, especially once relationships have become strained. This also requires a sufficient level of psychological safety within the triad, so that people are able to be open and admit their vulnerabilities and concerns (e.g., Nembhard & Edmunson, 2011). This is helped by the SPC establishing a good relationship with both the athlete and coach individually so the relationships are mutual. There is a need to avoid any feeling that the SPC and athlete are "ganging up" on the coach. Or vice-versa, SPC and coach ganging up on athlete. Even with all these conditions in place, the athlete and coach need a sufficient level of emotional maturity to be willing to have difficult conversations, or share challenging feedback, even with the support of a skilled facilitator.

The SPC was both frustrated and disappointed when he learned about these problems as late as he did. However, the SPC made several assumptions which contributed to the situation. First, he underestimated the power differential in the relationship between Steve and himself. Based on previous engagements with more experienced coaches, he assumed a mutual working relationship between coach and SPC in which both parties contribute their expertise in service of the athlete. In this context asking for help is not a sign of weakness, it is an essential aspect of high performance culture. Yet he did not make this working principle explicit and did not fully explore Rick and Steve's views during the initial contracting. Instead, he assumed that either athlete or coach would proactively ask for assistance when needed. Given the difficulties in securing time together, the SPC chose to take Rick and Steve's reports that the pair enjoyed a highly positive and constructive relationship at face value, rather than to seek to develop the foundations of their communication. On reflection it also appears there was a degree of impression management at play with both coach and athlete keen to present an overly positive face to the SPC. Likewise, the SPC was reluctant to offer feedback so early in the working

relationship. This is typical of established working relationships and reduced the quality of interaction (Connor & Pokora, 2010). Well-developed relationships allow all parties to contribute in an honest and forthright manner, raising and explaining concerns without communication being hindered by impression management.

The sport psychology consultation took place in the run-up to an immovable deadline; participation in an Olympic Games. The need to qualify added to this time pressure and a sense of a closing window of opportunity. The SPC entered this situation too late to establish personal working relationships with athlete and coach and the majority of working time was by email or Skype. This was frustrating for the SPC, as it was very difficult to spend enough time building a relationship with both and getting beneath a superficial level of contact, especially with coach Steve. The lack of face-to-face contact reduced the richness of communication and insight that can be gained from non-verbal communication and could have been a factor that prevented earlier attention to the athlete-coach relationship. This is in accord with Tod and Andersen's (2012) suggestion that “practitioners are less effective if they are unable to meet with athletes often enough to resolve client issues” (p. 285).

Balancing the role of researcher and SPC

It is difficult to impose a tightly structured research methodology or timeline of meetings onto elite athletes, therefore there is an emergent quality to applied research. For example, it is rarely possible to package it as neatly as a conventional experiment. Most significantly, there were times when the SPC had to decide between his needs as a researcher and meeting his client's needs. For example, the meeting with Rick in person a few weeks before the Olympics might have provided a useful opportunity to revisit the materials, interview him at length about his experience of the sources of self-confidence, and generally progress the research agenda. In the time available, Rick's urgent and immediate priority was to “get his head straight”. Faced with an ethical dilemma, the SPC's internal priority shifted from research to supporting Rick in his preparation for the Olympics. This was in keeping with the SPC's own ethical stance, in which the well-being of clients needs to be held in the

foreground. It was a decision consistent with Meara and Schmidt's (1991) recommendations that qualitative research should do no harm, and ideally work for the benefit of the participants (see also Jones, Evans, & Mullen, 2007).

Putting Rick's needs first also meant that the SPC chose not to offer to intervene further to help him rebuild his relationship with Steve immediately prior to the Olympics. This was despite the SPC having significant experience facilitating team development sessions, often in conflicted situations, and teamwork (between athlete and coach), being the important fourth psychological fundamental of the PDM. Firstly, there was a lack of any obvious time to do so. Getting diaries to align even for the meeting with Rick after qualification had been difficult and they had been trying unsuccessfully to schedule a three-way meeting for some time. Rick's schedule over the coming weeks was hectic. The SPC had the skills to identify the exact nature of conflict problem, analyze the reasons for its occurrence and develop strategies to manage the conflict between Rick and Steve, in the type of "analyst and action planner" role identified by Jowett and colleagues in research with sport psychology practitioners (Wachsmuth, et al., 2018, 2020). In addition, lack of time was one of the inhibiting factors for effective athlete-coach conflict resolution also identified by Wachsmuth, et al. (2018, 2020). Secondly, the SPC also sensed that Steve was withdrawing from the collaboration between athlete, coach, and SPC, due to his non-availability/unwillingness to meet. In hindsight, the SPC could have made a more sustained effort to contact Steve at the time, but the weight of the factors just described led the SPC to focus his efforts with Rick alone. While the present researchers remain confident that applied qualitative research provides valuable insights, it must also come with a warning that compromise to the research design and rigor will often be necessary, and indeed essential, to maintain the primacy of the SPC-athlete relationship.

The Effectiveness of the PDM Materials

Given that the PDM is a coach-based approach, it was necessary to ensure the coach was engaged from the start of the process of developing a specific PDM for Rick. The intention was that

this process would help to identify priority areas for sport psychology intervention through the season. The PDM materials had a high degree of face validity for Rick and Steve when first introduced, evidenced by their positive response and ability to recognize and give examples from their own experience. The three initially worked through the PDM, focusing on the five days of Olympic competition, based on Rick's self-reported under-performance at the previous year's World Championship. The process of considering pre-event, competition and post-event stages prompted a rich discussion between coach and athlete. It raised several important questions of detail and identified areas where both needed to learn more (e.g., about transit times between the Olympic village and the stadium and about Steve's likely level of access to Rick during the event). Rick later affirmed the usefulness of the materials: "I found all four components of mental performance in my sport. They all assisted me in my preparation towards the games. All materials were clear and coherent. I understood it all and could identify with it comfortably." However, in the review feedback comments[(9)], Rick pointed to the deteriorating relationship with his coach as a problem that the PDM failed to identify:

> The Performance Model described the challenges I faced before the competition, however it also omitted one challenge, which was the challenge of knowing what to do if your support structure was to break down. I faced a challenging season as my coach struggled to assist me in getting my timing back. I lost the feeling for the [projectile] which contributed to massive inconsistency in my competitions. This affected my performance all season and it was something I was not necessary [sic] prepared for.

Coach Steve described the intervention as "useful early on. It was always in the back of my mind". However, as the season progressed and the pressure to qualify increased, Steve's focus shifted to seeking a purely technical solution. As a result, he was able to offer only limited feedback on the utility of the materials.

> I was focusing less on the psychological things or anything else. My main goal was to get him into a rhythm that would allow him to throw a long way. Other things fell by the wayside – it

> wasn't easy for Rick either…. They [psych materials] lost relevance due to the technical focus – it was technique technique technique. I was up to all hours studying [video] footage trying to find a way to get him to relax. I'm a volunteer coach; Rick is the first world class athlete I've coached, so maybe other coaches would have used the psychological tools more. But he had blatant technical faults, and the closer to the Games, the more important this became.

Could the SPC have made more rigorous use of the PDM materials? Rick referred to it several times as a useful guide and the SPC encouraged him to re-visit and update it regularly to remind himself of the sources of confidence. With more contact time, Rick and the SPC could have re-visited it more thoroughly together as the Games approached and used it more specifically to identify the performance demands in that environment, including the breakdown in communication with his coach. It is telling that Steve saw little relevance to the PDM as the season progressed and he became increasingly focused on "fixing" Rick's technical problem. The PDM was deliberately focused on performance at the Olympics, but the immediate challenge facing athlete and coach was to overcome a technical problem and throw the qualifying distance in order to qualify for the Olympics. Thus it is not surprising that materials focused on preparing for the demands of Olympic performance became increasingly irrelevant when qualification was appearing unlikely.

In order to be relevant to emerging demands and issues, the PDM needs regular attention to help predict, and respond to, the dynamic nature of preparation and performance in elite sport. It also needs to be explicitly relevant to the short and medium demands of training and qualification, not just a single high profile competition, such as the Olympics. This may require different versions of the PDM checklist for training and competition and for different competitions. The PDM also needs to explicitly document process, performance, and outcome goals to make it easier to identify differences in emphasis or interpretation and ensure a shared understanding by all relevant parties (Jowett, 2007). In addition to previous research studies (Hudson, Males, & Kerr, 2019; Males, Hudson, & Kerr, 2018, 2020), using the PDM with Rick and Steve fostered useful feedback to aid in its use and ongoing

development.

Conclusion

What can be concluded about the overall success of this consultancy work? Certainly, Rick was successful in achieving his goal of competing in the Olympics and, despite only an average performance, was positive and proud of his achievement. Steve returned to his “comfort zone” of coaching club-level athletes, a bit battered, but perhaps more experienced as a result. The consultancy added to the SPC's knowledge and experience along with some valuable lessons. Jowett's (2007) model of interpersonal factors in athlete-coach relationships proved useful for understanding and interpreting Rick and Steve's relationship conflict. The concepts of closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation were relevant, as were notions of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral expressions of conflict in the present research (Wachsmuth, et al., 2018, 2020). It is hoped that the “thick descriptions" of the SPC's consulting experiences with an elite athlete and coach in this case study have relevance for other applied sport psychologists in their own professional practices.

There are five recommendations to other SPCs that might inform future athlete-coach consultancies and interventions arising from the present case study. These are, be willing to: (1) be as realistic as possible with clients about what can be achieved with limited contact time and decline an engagement if there is insufficient time to create conditions for a meaningful engagement; (2) ensure early in an engagement that both athlete and coach are equipped to offer and receive constructive feedback, not just provide mutual affirmation. This needs to be mutually agreed as part of initial contracting; (3) speak up earlier in response to initial observations or hunches (e.g., with regard to the nature of the athlete-coach relationship); (4) establish equal and separate relationships with athlete and coach, in order to work effectively with their relationship; (5) test the real understanding of an athlete's and coach’s professed understanding of psychological principles.

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Table 1

Chronological list of most important contacts between SPC athlete and/or coach

Type of contact	Key content
Introductory athlete & coach phone calls[(1)]	Contracting
3-way face-to- face meeting[(2)]	Agreed goals started to develop PDM
3-way Skype call at end of hard training block[(3)]	More focus, 4 PB's in the gym
3-way Skype call after US training camp[(4)]	Reviewed US camp. Coach says we "didn't fully nail heavier projectile technique" Previewed German & British competitions
SPC-athlete phone call 1 week after German & British competitions[(5)]	Reviewed German & British competitions. Discussed tactics for dealing with disappointment (illness) & re-focusing
SPC-athlete Skype call day after UKA team trials[(6)]	Post-trials review of attempts to throw Olympic qualifying distance at 3 events
The athlete failed to reach qualifying distance at European Championships, but finally achieves it at a British regional event	
2-way face-to- face meeting SPC-athlete instigated by the athlete[(7)]	Discussed deteriorating athlete-coach relationship & developed a strategy for pre-Olympics training camp abroad
SPC-athlete Skype call just before Olympic competition[(8)]	Discussed Olympic environment & "what if" scenarios to build confidence
The athlete threw close to his average distance for the season, but well below gold medal distance. He was initially affected by crowd noise, technically he felt tight, but enjoyed the Olympic experience	
Post-Olympics emails to the athlete by SPC[(9)] for feedback through formal evaluation questions & follow-up	Reviewed Olympic performance, the sport psychology support & use of PDM materials. Advised that the coach was no longer coaching him
Post-Olympics email & phone call interview with the coach by SPC[(10)] to obtain feedback through formal evaluation questions. These were asked verbally as he had not looked at them in advance	Reviewed Olympic performance, sport psychology support & use of PDM materials

Table 2

The PDM based on the four psychological fundamentals (mastery motivation, decision making, execution and teamwork). The table shows the key points Rick should focus on at the different stages of a competition (i.e., for the pre-event, competition and post-event periods)

Pre-event (3 days in village)	Competition	Post-event (between qualifying and finals)
Mastery Motivation (Competitive Spirit) Maintain positive focus on own plan and timetable of activities Guard against Village/sponsor distractions Maintain calm, relaxed approach Don't think too much about competition. Stay healthy *Decision Making* Check in with coach regarding any unplanned changes *Teamwork* Talk to coach when needed. Maintain independence in Village environment, eat at own times, avoid uninvited massage treatment, etc. Team mobile phone, so absolute choice over who to speak to in this period *Questions:* Can you find a place to meet outside the Village, in * [name of location]? Do you need to let some people know that you won't be contactable in this period?	*Mastery Motivation (Competitive Spirit)* Stay relaxed, light hearted before throwing. Switch on for warm up Game face on in call room Ignore others' attempts at "games" in call rooms Remind self of the environment and *enjoy* the chance to perform in front of an Olympic crowd *Execution* Habitual – automatic technique 100% focused on executing each position Between throws routine – to be fine-tuned: communication with coach focus on own performance not that of competitors no surprises and always feeling confident because you have worked through different scenarios *Teamwork* Locate coach and maintain visual contact – feedback after each throw	*Mastery Motivation (Competitive Spirit)* Deal with media in the mixed zone Acknowledge and manage own emotional response to performance in qualifying Look after own needs for food, rest, recovery, etc. *Decision Making (Review)* Assess performance and re-commit to excellence Re-engage in planned routine – stay in the moment rather than going into the future *Teamwork* Talk with coach *Questions* Who else do you want to have contact with during this time? Will you need to do anything different to manage distractions in this period? (e.g. additional requests for media interview? Contact from other UKA coaches)? What's your contingency plan if coach becomes unavailable?

Table 3

Final version of athlete's sources of self-confidence questionnaire

Sources of self-confidence	Ideal Strength (1-10)	Current Strength (1-10)
Self		
Feeling like an actor; “I’m going to perform in front of an audience and get a standing ovation”		
See myself as a role model to others		
Technique - ability to execute each position		
Perseverance - knowing that I’m still doing it despite the “dark days”		
My faith		
Knowledge of own past performances		
Relationships		
My coach		
My wife		
Environmental		
Receiving compliments from others, especially other competitors		
Completing high-intensity repetitions in training, especially pre-competition - being “on fire”		
Hitting weight targets in the gym		
Familiarity with other competitors and watching them train - they are no longer on a pedestal		
Positive media coverage		

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